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A Transgressive Femininity:
Narrative, Spectacle and Desire in the
Films of María Luisa Bemberg

by

Denise Emily Miller

(Two Volumes)

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Film
Studies**

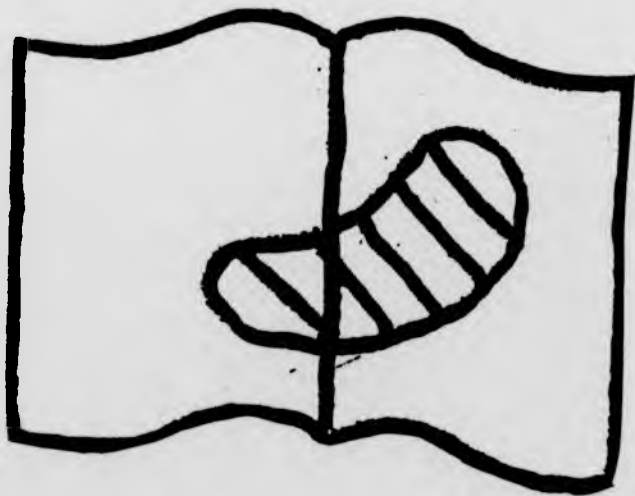
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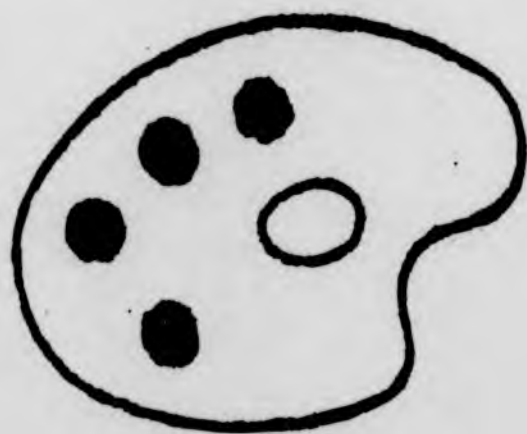
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I dedicate this thesis - written to the memory of Alan Charity (you listen with an ear of the angels) - to my mother.

Mexico City, 21 July 2003

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for another degree at another university. Some sections of Chapters Three and Five have been published as 'María Luisa Bemberg's Adaptation of Octavio Paz' Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz', in King J., Whitaker, S. and Bosch R. eds. 2000. An Argentine Passion: María Luisa Bemberg and Her Films. London: Verso, pages 137-173. Some sections of Chapter Seven have been adapted as 'Excessive Femininity in María Luisa Bemberg's Costuming of Luisina Brando', for the forthcoming: Moseley, R. ed. Fashioning Stars: Dress, Culture, Identity. London: BFI Publishing.

ABSTRACT

This study presents the first detailed textual analysis of the six feature films of Argentine feminist María Luisa Bemberg, 1922-1995. Analysis - important because Bemberg is a major, but critically-neglected, woman filmmaker - was addressed to her construction of transgressive heroines. By transgressive is meant the challenges - that successfully - Bemberg's female protagonists make, to actual, and to the representational, strictures that history and cinema, respectively, have placed upon them. There are two divisions. Contexts places Bemberg's feminist work and protagonists within Argentine culture. It asks of her cinema and protagonists how far it (and they) helped redefine Argentine cinema. Feminism asks two principal questions - based in feminist film theory - of Bemberg's feminist constructions. Firstly it asks what happens to Bemberg's female protagonists. Secondly - in examining the mise-en-scène of femininity - it asks how Bemberg's films, her protagonists and her spectator are gendered and 'look.'

Primary sources were the films themselves, Bemberg's collaborators in Buenos Aires, contemporary film journals and newspapers, and unpublished documents in Bemberg's archive. Analyses of this data were situated in the contexts of Argentine politics, culture and filmmaking, and international women's filmmaking. This thesis' secondary sources - formal and feminist film (as well as some cultural) theories - were applied to the analyses as a way of evaluating them.

Bemberg's protagonists indeed transgress multifarious social and religious boundaries set against their womanhood. My findings further suggest that Bemberg's work contributed a popular, as well as a feminist, vocabulary to Argentine (and Latin American) cinema, whilst textual exegesis suggests that her filmmaking practice transgresses some feminist film theoretical expectations concerning the gaze and the gendering of spectatorship. The thesis concludes that in her visually pleasurable construction of transgressive femininity, Bemberg created a new 'look.' Therein she made her major contribution to feminist filmmaking.

INTRODUCTION

The Topic

The feature filmmaking of Argentine María Luisa Bemberg spans the years 1981 to 1995. In this time she completed six films, Momentos/Moments (1981), Señora de Nadie/Nobody's Wife (1982), Camila (1984), Miss Mary (1986), Yo, la peor de todas/I, the Worst of All (1990) and De eso no se habla/We Don't Want to Talk About It (1993).¹ Bemberg - who to date is the only woman director popularly-known within her own country - was a successful filmmaker. The two genres in which primarily she worked were the historical costume drama and melodrama (including 'The Woman's Film'). In her sumptuous, classic-narrative and feminist films, a female protagonist - through whom Bemberg set out to challenge the look at and of woman - is foregrounded:

All women share an alternative optics, though often, instead of using our own eyes, we prefer to accept the established codes ... From my little corner of the world, I have tried to propose autonomous, lucid, independent women and to create mechanisms of identification so that women in the audience have an example for their own growth (in Jaffe and Robin 1991, 338).

This thesis uses textual exegesis to answer how Bemberg's feminist film practices construct alternative heroines and optics, thus to measure her contribution to feminist filmmaking - both within and beyond Argentina.

¹ See Appendix One, Filmography. Brief synopses of these films are given in Chapter One. Detailed synopses are given at relevant points of analysis throughout the thesis.

Bemberg's purpose of transgression is clear: the liberation of woman. 'I decided that all my stories would follow the thread of a woman who transgresses repressive rules, because I believe that transgression is the essence of liberty' (in Jaffe and Robin 1991, 338). The thesis begins with the narrative transgressions of Bemberg's protagonists. It ends with an examination of how, through their narrative transgressions, Bemberg constructs a new form of feminine speech across the screen to her protagonists' spectator. It asks in what ways is this speech 'transgressive.'

The Fields and Methodology

This study, with qualifications, is predicated on a romantic concept of the artist as a single source of identity and meaning because the debate about authorship is central to considerations of women filmmakers. Nevertheless, it avoids an entirely auteurist approach by seeking to 'understand' Bemberg's feminist filmmaking from three broad but inter-related areas of knowledge and of practice: of Latin American/Argentine culture, of women's filmmaking, and of formal issues. These fields comprise:

1. LATIN AMERICAN/ARGENTINE CULTURE: the socio/political and literary/artistic, notably filmic.
2. WOMEN'S FILMMAKING: film practice, feminist film theory and female authorship.
3. FORMAL ISSUES: narrative, mise-en-scène, point-of-view structuring and genre.

The survey and discussion of these fields is distributed across the chapters.

The research proceeded by three stages. Firstly, Bemberg's six feature films were extensively analysed. Secondly, the observations were situated in the two contexts of Argentine/Latin American and international women's filmmaking, by an extensive viewing of work in these areas. Thirdly, the initial comparative judgements made were moderated by an application of the theoretical studies in the areas listed above.

Although the present study prefers to view context through the filter of the text, the analysis recognizes that text and context are mutually interpretive.² Thus the first field of study, Latin American/Argentine Culture, is contextual and ensures that broader than just feminist applications of film textual and cultural analysis obtain. Bemberg's Argentine formation, social, political and cultural, is central to an understanding not only of her contribution to Argentine cinematic practice, but to feminism. Whilst a major area of criticism here is on Argentine and Latin American film, symptomatically the general surveys concentrate on male directors, and either mention Bemberg in passing or devote her minimal space. This is true even of those few studies of Latin American women filmmakers. Meanwhile, whilst it is growing, the literature devoted solely to Bemberg remains small.³ Symptomatic of such smallness is the sole book (a slim volume of sixty-four pages) by a single author. This is Clara Fontana's María Luisa

² 'The cultural historian reads and weighs culture in texts and texts in culture' (Dudley Andrew in Hill and Church Gibson 1998, 186).

³ The literature on Latin American film and on Bemberg is examined in detail in Chapter One.

Bemberg (1993).⁴ There is one bibliography of Bemberg studies, De identidades: María Luisa Bemberg. filmografía y bibliografía, compiled by Lourdes Vázquez (1999) and forming the sixth part of a Latin American database on the Internet.⁵ For academic studies on Bemberg, I have searched the same sources as Vázquez, namely the film databases of The MLA (American Bibliography) and The International Federation of Film Archives, and the same few books (Fontana 1993, Burton-Carvajal 1991, and Trelles Plazaola 1991 and 1992).⁶ Thus the part of my bibliography that contains direct references to Bemberg similarly comprises interviews, newspaper and film journal articles, and obituaries, most of which appear in newspapers, magazines and trade papers. These sources are both Argentine and international. (The latter increase exponentially as, increasingly, Bemberg's films were exhibited worldwide.)

The last two fields of study are textual analytical. This approach occupies a space left by Latin American Film Studies that has favoured a historicist approach. Nevertheless, textual analysis (underpinned by feminist film theory) is favoured not only because it has not been done before in Bemberg studies, but because by its means Bemberg's feminist film practice can be evaluated. This evaluation begins with an address of Bemberg's 'autobiographical' films. These films request an examination of her female/feminist authorship that is not

⁴ Fontana's book is an Argentine publication comprising a general introduction to Bemberg's work, much along the lines of study-guide material to students as yet unacquainted with her work.

⁵ <http://www.libs.uga.edu/lais/laisno.6.html>. Although the last update to this bibliography was 30 July 2002, it has not included An Argentine Passion: María Luisa Bemberg and Her Films (King, Whitaker and Bosch 2000), the second book on Bemberg solely.

⁶ FIAF is accessed through <http://www.shef.ac.uk/library/edfiles/html/ifarch>. In addition, I have searched The International Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com>). The latter does not give any information supplementary to the other two sources. All of these databases were last accessed and checked 20 July 2003.

essentialist in approach.⁷ Autobiography - the writing one(s)self - is a way of presenting one's uniqueness in the world. This study asks what model of female authorship, what auteurist preoccupation, can be applied to Bemberg, so that it can evaluate what sets her apart from other women and feminist filmmakers. These are essential questions of a feminist filmmaker: From the 1950s' debates in Cahiers du cinéma, through Barthes' ideas of the death of the author, to the 1980s, when there was a shift towards audience studies, film studies has been preoccupied with defining authorship. The feminist intervention into this debate, encouraging the emergence of new voices and looking to resuscitate old ones, occurred just when the author had 'died.' Critics, like Kaja Silverman, recognised such bad timing, and as late as 1998, in The Acoustic Mirror, were still fighting for the assertion of the female author whose speaking should 'be asserted by the critic and filmmaker, not stripped' (Silverman 1998, 192). Foucault asks (1984, 46) whether it matters who speaks. It matters more for women (and others dispossessed) who cannot take their access to speech - and to the formulation of such a question - for granted. As Rosa Braidotti (1991, 148-150) points out, 'In order to announce the death of the subject, one must first have gained the right to speak as one.'

Conversely, feminists vest an interest in deconstructing the tradition of the enlightenment that privileged the powerful, male, authorial figure. Thus certain feminist theoretical positions of the 1970s found a way of accommodating the female author within the anti-auteurist debate, by shifting analysis from an author to the internal formal and thematic workings of (her) texts. By looking

⁷ To adapt Edward Said's (1993) proposition in Culture and Imperialism, one problem with asserting women's (cultural) identity as a means of resistance to masculine (imperial and

for an organising textual principle of method and of motifs, such auteur structuralism still enabled analysis of one author's body of work. This drew in part on Cahiers du cinéma's (1969) idea of category 'e' texts whose formal ruptures (in spite of themselves) imply a criticism of mainstream ideology. Thus Cahiers' auteur theory could also be re-defined as looking at those unconscious preoccupations to be decoded in the formal play of film texts. Such post-structuralist revisions of auteur theory that challenged ideas of the director as an intentional source of meaning still allowed Claire Johnston (1973) a consideration of the oeuvres of female authors. She celebrates the filmmaking of Dorothy Arzner, and of Ida Lupino, as ones whose texts reveal, however unconsciously, an internal criticism of the mainstream modes within which they are working. The question what is peculiar to a woman director and that can be identified as her authorial signature still remains crucial to the assertion of a feminist cinema, however. Otherwise, women's voices are further silenced. In the 1990s Judith Mayne (1990, 89-123) and Sandy Flitterman Lewis (1990, 1-43) looked for theories of female authorship that are alternative to those that situate themselves solely in the structural frameworks of semiology and psychoanalysis. Their theories - ones that combine psychoanalysis with questions of history, of autobiography and of textual analysis - accord with the model of female authorship that this thesis applies to an analysis of Bemberg's work.

colonialist narratives) is that of creating a new kind of feminist (cultural) essentialism.

Nevertheless, Bemberg's texts posit a possible contradiction between the textual instance of enunciation and the author as individual.⁸ To such contradiction Flitterman Lewis (1990, 21) presents three solutions: '1) authorship as a historical phenomenon, suggesting the cultural context; 2) authorship as a desiring position, involving determinants of sexuality and gender; and 3) authorship as a textual moment.' My textual analysis is situated at the enunciating instance of the text which involves author, spectator and text, and after presenting the first 'solution' (Bemberg's cultural context) as introduction to her films (in Chapter One), concerns itself with gauging the second solution (Bemberg's desiring position) from the third one (Bemberg's textual moment).

Thus in this thesis' third field of study, Formal Issues, analysis of 'authorship as a textual moment' revolves around aspects of Bemberg's practice which are neither exclusively nor straightforwardly feminist. These are those of genre (with its related questions of mise-en-scène) and of narrative. This field of study is large. It is underpinned by film theoretical studies of the costume drama (including the historical costume drama) and melodrama (including 'The Woman's Film'). The debates surrounding these genres help gauge Bemberg's filmmaking transgressions, of received film theoretical wisdom and of (Latin American) melodramatic practice. In some films one genre is crossed with the other. Thus this study asks how we read Bemberg's feminist film practice in her crossing of genres.

⁸ By 'enunciation' is meant not what, but how, the film text positions the object, and how it positions as well as the diegetic subject of looking, the extra-diegetic one (in other words, the spectator).

Evaluations of these genres beg questions and further reading concerning adaptations of literature and history into film. Robert Rosenstone (1995) asserts that any historical film (especially the historical costume drama) poses a challenge to the traditional representation of history because it asserts the primacy of visual, over verbal, understanding. Beyond their 'always already' challenge to history however, this study asks how Bemberg's films contest those ideas of 'true story' that some history presupposes. Furthermore, Bemberg's use of costume requires that such readings be made in conjunction with theories of sexuality as performance and with those of the representation of masculinity as well as of femininity. Other critical literature found to be pertinent to an evaluation of Bemberg's practices comprise star studies, theories of postmodernism and of carnival, and that which examines the narrative modes of autobiography and of 'magical realism.' These readings help evaluate not only Bemberg's feminist, but, Latin American, inflections of form.

The Divisions of the Thesis

The study divides into two sections, Contexts and Feminism. Although the textual analysis was made first, Contexts is introductory to the closer textual explication of Feminism. The principal question Contexts asks is what Bemberg's cinema contributed to Argentine (and Latin American) filmmaking. In Feminism (the fields of Women's Filmmaking and Formal Issues), two principal questions, of Story and Voice, are asked. The question of Story asks what happens to Bemberg's female protagonists. The question of Voice (in examining the mise-en-scène of femininity) asks how Bemberg's protagonists

and films look.⁹ From these two questions many others arise. Their details are outlined in the summaries of my chapters below. None of the questions asked have been applied to an analysis of Bemberg's films in the (little) published literature so far. Thus this thesis will be answering Gabriela Massuh's lament that 'Nobody has ever taken the trouble to analyse to what extent María Luisa was developing her own film language' and presents some of that 'further scholarship' which according to Sheila Whitaker the editors of An Argentine Passion hoped to prompt (in King, Whitaker and Bosch 2000, 53-55, and xii, respectively).

Chapter One begins Contexts by situating Bemberg as Argentine, aristocrat, feminist and filmmaker. It delineates her cultural and filmic contexts. It explores her life and filmmaking, her stated feminist motivation, her placing as an upper-class woman intellectual in Argentina, and her critical reception at home and abroad. It also delimits her relationship to, and difference from, other Argentine and women filmmakers. Finally, it considers her popular, critical and academic reception both at home and abroad. Chapters Two to Four place all six of Bemberg's films within their wider than just feminist contexts. Chapter Two begins the textual analysis proper. It considers Bemberg's representation of women in her autobiographical films (Momentos, Señora de Nadie, Miss Mary) and thus her representation of some personal contexts discussed in Chapter One. Chapter Three turns to the analysis of Bemberg's feminist treatment of historical women (Camila and Yo, la peor de todas). The real Camila and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz were crushed - to death. The chapter asks

⁹ The look of Bemberg's films is examined in both its active and passive senses. By 'Voice' is meant (in this thesis) both this look, and sound (as cinema's principal modes of enunciation).

what hi/stories Bemberg makes her protagonists speak: whether and how she makes her 'real' characters resist. In so doing it looks at the representation of women (and men) in history, and takes account of stylistic and narrative transformations of history into the filmic costume drama. It also asks how Bemberg crosses this genre with the melodrama. Chapter Four explores - in De eso no se habla - Bemberg's final narrative mode of fable. It advisedly labels this mode as 'magical realism' and considers its applications to the film's political references. Bemberg's play with the carnivalesque in this film is also examined.

Chapters Five to Seven comprise the second part of the thesis. Feminism measures Bemberg's feminist filmmaking against feminist film practice and theory. Chapter Five begins with narrative. It examines the trajectory of Bemberg's female protagonist (with some flashbacks and jumps forward), within and across all six films. It asks who (and what other obstacles) she encounters on her way, how she resists them, and of what themes is she thus made agent. It therefore examines her transgressions against men - as represented in the family - to against the Church and the State, and follows her placing from within a local domestic Argentine to within a wider, more universal and mythical 'history.'

Whilst all previous analysis has of necessity taken account of the 'look' of Bemberg's films, Chapters Six and Seven turn to the analysis of its construction. Chapter Six asks how her films and protagonists look. Thus it examines Bemberg's formal inflections. It begins with an analysis of the female gaze

through an exploration of extant feminist film theoretical frameworks of criticism and understanding. In examining Bemberg's mise-en-scène, Chapter Six also relates her use of the tableau to the display of beautiful female actresses - like Julie Christie and Assumpta Serna - and it questions how far their star images fit their roles. Chapter Seven concentrates its analysis on Bemberg's generic inflections in the 'ultimate' of her costume dramas, De eso no se habla, and takes special account of Bemberg's direction of (her favourite actress) Luisina Brando. The chapter continues Chapter Six's questions regarding a woman-to-woman address in Bemberg's later films. Now it asks what kind of displayed woman the re-orientated spectator gaze is looking (actively) at, and what is the quality of the spectator's pleasure. To this end it asks in what (and against what) the display of the female protagonist consists. How are Bemberg's women costumed within their mise-en-scènes of femininity and to what extent do their costumes stand out? In answering these questions the chapter will conclude this thesis' suggestions as to how Bemberg's films construct a new 'look' to feminist films, and in what, therefore, the character of her authorial signature consists.

Originality

One originality of this study - the first to assess the particularity of Bemberg's contribution to feminist filmmaking - lies in its primary sources. Its most important primary source - extensively analysed - are the texts of the films themselves. Interviews were conducted with Bemberg's collaborators in Buenos Aires in August and September 2000. (Where interviewees are quoted they are cited by name, place and date in footnotes.) Unpublished documents in

Bemberg's archive (The Miguens Archive) were also analysed.¹⁰ Argentine and international journalistic articles, reviews and obituaries are gathered from various sources - principally from The Miguens Archive and cinematecas in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. Appendix Four names interviewees (with details of relationship to Bemberg), dates of interviews, and archival visits. All of these sources are the foundation for Chapter One's assessments on Bemberg's place in Argentina. (Where the reviews cited in Chapter One were not published in Buenos Aires, place of publication will be given. Whilst author, date and page numbers of reviews are given wherever possible, many of Chapter One's references - as well as those of the Appendices - cite no page numbers, and/or no dates, and/or no authors, when they have been made from un-referenced cuttings in The Miguens Archive.) Unless otherwise indicated, all translations into English from all Spanish texts - including those of the films - are my own. All second references to foreign (usually Spanish) titles are in English. That vocabulary discussing film shots (for example, mid-close-up shot), I have hyphenated only when it is used in either adjectival or adverbial qualification. Finally, whilst film-still images support much of the textual analysis, their number was rationalized, so that there are not as many as could have illustrated (decoratively as well as analytically) all arguments. I have often (begging the indulgence of grammatical purists) used a film-still image as a phrase, so making it a syntactical element of my text. That text in turn has avoided (where it has made sense) tautological reference to figure numbers.

¹⁰ This archive is in the keeping of Bemberg's daughter, Cristina Miguens. See Appendix Three.

Although this study eschews an intentionalist approach, it sometimes quotes (to question) Bemberg's statements on feminism and filmmaking. It could not quote from what have enriched my general appreciation of her ideas: the myriad unpublished and unedited dramas, screenplays, and short stories to which her daughter, Cristina Miguens, generously allowed me access. All of them are true to Bemberg's feminist, witty and magical perspective on life.

PART ONE:

CONTEXTS

CHAPTER ONE

Socio-Cultural and Political Contexts: María Luisa Bemberg - Feminist Filmmaker in Argentina

Introduction

At a symposium at Leeds Castle in England in May 1989, María Luisa Bemberg suggested what it means to be an artist in Latin America.¹ She identified the problem of Latin American identity as one of inheriting cultures that are not one's own. Being Argentine (according to her) suggested a double disadvantage: 'We're not in touch with a rich, civilized, indigenous past ... and yet we are a country of immigrants.' She was born in 'this federal capital which makes perpetual exiles of its citizens: porteños (people of the port) in Argentina, Europeans in their own country and South Americans in Europe.' Being a woman creator in such a patriarchal country augmented this sense of displacement. She said her 'drive to disentangle (her) identity would be reflected ... in (her) cinematic work,' which (we shall see) is fed by her feelings of on-edginess and of being hybrid.²

¹ The symposium was organized by Silvia de Condylis. Bemberg's talk was named Being an Artist in Latin America and is translated from the Spanish by Jason Wilson (as Bemberg 1989, in King, Whitaker and Bosch 2000, 216-223).

² I take the phrase 'on-edginess' from Beatriz Sarlo whose (1993) book on Jorge Luis Borges describes and explores his position as an Argentine writer as A Writer on the Edge. 'The edge' describes the physical situation of Buenos Aires, with its face looking over the Atlantic Ocean to Europe and with its back to the Argentine hinterland. Argentina's peripheral relation to a more 'civilised' Europe on the one hand, and to the 'uncivilised' hinterland on the other, was established in Argentine cultural consciousness early in its history. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's La vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga/The Life of Juan Facundo Quiroga (1999,

At the age of fifty when she directed her first (short) film, María Luisa Bemberg had little time and an important job to do. Bemberg's conversations suggest that the construction of a feminine vision was vital to her, and she believed that only a woman could do it. Tucumán's La Gaceta (15 May 1988) features an interview in which as a now-established filmmaker she is asked, 'Do you think that your cinematographic representations are different to those of a man?' Her answer is worth quoting at length:

Without doubt. The only thing that remains the same is the technology, the camera. But the eye that looks is completely different ... Now that we are rising up in the cinema we can invent our own language, sometimes to denounce (our prior representation), sometimes to revindicate ourselves.

The need to recreate a feminine identity arises from what Bemberg (1989, 219) calls its fracture: 'This century's oppression of women in which we are reflected is broken. From this fracture, we must begin to build - out of fragments and with our liberty - a truer identity in which we can all recognize ourselves.' In her six feature films Bemberg disentangled seven feminine protagonists - whose journeys and encounters Chapter Five will discuss - out of the fragments of her own life.

This chapter maps out those elements in Bemberg's life that we may recognize in her films. Because Bemberg's first films review both her Argentine and

originally 1845) set a civilising 'agenda' for Argentina (in particular) in suggesting that Latin America could only overcome its 'barbaric' past by adopting European models.

feminine, as repressed, formations, this chapter begins where she began to recognize herself - in Buenos Aires and with her aristocratic upbringing - before placing her feminism, artistic practice and aesthetic concerns within other of her cultural, political and filmic contexts. If Buenos Aires has 'its back to the hinterland' and looks to Europe, its wealthier residents, such as Bemberg, informed by their education and travel, are steeped in European culture. Bemberg read widely in western literature. Often her Argentine context involves a European one. Although all of the films have high production values (Bemberg's aristocratic background is important here, as well as in providing her with some of her themes and implicitly forming her tastes), her later films are politically complex. They explore the relationship between patriarchal politics and the repression of women, in both real historical moments and in fantasy. Thus her feminism is a challenge to wider political issues than the narrower condition of her usually Argentine upper-middle-class protagonists would suggest. This was not always critically understood at the time that the films were released. Nevertheless, as the only woman always to appear in histories and lists of Argentine filmmakers, Bemberg remains the first and lone major Argentine woman film director. Finally, therefore, this chapter contrasts her public with her critical reception in Argentina before reviewing the academic literature - both Argentine and international - that has since reclaimed her work.³

³ Original sources for this chapter are catalogued in three ways: The Sheila Whitaker Archive (Appendix Two) comprises a considerable sample from The Miguens Archive of newspaper and magazine reviews, interviews etc. My discussion of The Miguens Archive (Appendix Three) is therefore limited to what else - of pertinence to this thesis' project - I found there. This chapter also refers to my Further Research in Argentina (Appendix Four), which comprises interviews, and information retrieved from various institutions of cinema.

That Bemberg was not accorded sufficient critical recognition in her lifetime is indicated by the fact that she did not see the point of keeping an archive. She did not credit that she would be famous. Thus the small archive in the keeping of her daughter, Cristina Miguens, comprises for the most part personal working documents and reviews. Two small collections are revealing. One is of postcards of the 'masters' depicting women at domestic work.⁴ One is a file of pornographic photographs of women. These constitute respective examples of the exploitative use of and gaze at women that her filmmaking set out to counter.

1. Biography

María Luisa Bemberg, 1922-1995, was born the fourth of five children into an aristocratic Catholic Argentine family, whose riches included the Quilmes beer estate. As her name suggests, this family has Teutonic origins. The first Bemberg in Argentina was Otto Pedro, a businessman who arrived circa 1850, and married Luisa de Ocampo and into the heart of the criollo Argentine aristocracy in 1852. The Bembergs are therefore relative newcomers and would have felt the snobbery of the older élites who trace their criollo ancestry to the conquistadors.⁵ Bemberg's contact with her parents was restricted to a few minutes each day, but she felt passionately about them. As a child she 'detested' her father, Otto Eduardo, but later, 'I understood that he had noble qualities and that he had been forced by birth to live an existence that he did not like' (in de Miguel 1998, 162-3). She was less forgiving towards her mother, Sofía Elena Bengolea, whom she accused of being a victim producing victims. In her most personal film Miss Mary (1986) in which 'incidents from my childhood gave me

⁴ According to her secretary, Patricia Maldonado (Buenos Aires, 29 August 2000), Bemberg said that all women in the paintings of the masters were nude, toiling, mothering or pregnant.

my point of departure' (in Burton-Carvajal 1991, 342), the mother is 'a victim of repression who in turn projects her frustration onto others in a cycle that goes from generation to generation' (in Burton-Carvajal 1991, 344).

As an aristocratic child Bemberg did not go to school, having instead a total (in her most generous estimate) of twenty-three Catholic (preferably Irish) governesses, with whom - in place of her parents - she developed a love/hate relationship. By such seclusion she was protected from the world (in which she nevertheless traveled widely, especially in the USA, France and England). This protection she found claustrophobic. She composed stories from an early age as an escape from 'the asphyxiation of an insane society.'⁶ These stories found visual expression in the puppet theatre that she made and directed to her captive sibling audience: 'The realm of fantasy and spectacle always appealed to me' (in Burton-Carvajal 1991, 336), so that 'as an adult, I chose to make films because my way of understanding and expressing the world was predominantly visual' (Bemberg 1989, 220). She wanted to be an actress but in the face of family disapproval, 'I committed the sin of not daring to follow my own voices.'⁷ Instead, having fallen in love with student architect Carlos Miguens, she married him at the age of twenty-three in a match of whom her family approved. She mothered four children - two girls and two boys. However, her failure of courage when she was just starting out, was a constant source of regret. She felt stifled, discovering that 'procreation is not creation.'⁸ Thus, once her children had grown up, she left Miguens (whom she eventually

⁵ Even within aristocrat circles Bemberg seemed destined not to belong.

⁶ In *Address to a Girls' School* (England, 1989). (The school is unnamed in the original manuscript, which I translate. I am grateful to Cristina Miguens - daughter of Bemberg and trustee of her effects - to quote from this untitled and unpublished document.)

divorced, despite the fact that she remained a devout Catholic until the end of her life) and returned to her first love: the theatre.⁹

In the early 1960s Bemberg designed costumes for Mecha Ortíz (a well-known Argentine actress) in a production of Dürrenmatt's The Visit. The press reviews were so encouraging that in the mid 1960s she founded the Teatro del Globo with Catalina Wolff. She was, however, drawn from the back to the front of the house, 'alongside the director, seeing how a work was staged' (in Revista La Semana, 14 February 1982). Eventually she moved from theatre promotion to writing plays. In the late 1960s she took an acting course with Lee Strasberg in New York. Bemberg continued to write plays (as well as essays and short stories) until the end of her life. She wrote in French and in English as well as in Spanish, and everything she wrote is feminist. Her plays (as her films would be) are shot through with a melancholic sense of the comic. Many of the unpublished plays and miscellaneous items in The Miguens Archive - such as, Is This Woman Useless?: The Neuroses of a Bourgeois Woman (Panic): The Bedroom: Marriage in Argentina: The House by the Lake and We Women - treat the theme of marriage with sardonic wit.

Through her writing Bemberg was first encouraged in her work as a filmmaker. This was when she met Raúl de la Torre who commissioned and directed her script Crónica de una señora/A Woman's Story (1970). Nevertheless, Bemberg was frustrated with the finished product that (in her view) showed no sympathy

⁷ Ibid.
⁸ Ibid.

for the woman protagonist and her sense of marital alienation: 'Reinterpreted from a man's angle, my female characters were mutilated' (in King, Whitaker and Bosch 2000, 222).¹⁰ Bemberg's next script, Triángulo de cuatro/Four-sided Triangle, a comedy of infidelity amongst wealthy couples, was directed by another man, Fernando Ayala, and released in 1974 to commercial success. With this film Bemberg's frustration with the male treatment of her scripts was confirmed. Bemberg had, however, already begun directing because 'I had to stand behind a camera in order to be true to my own script' (in King, Whitaker and Bosch 2000, 222). All of Bemberg's scripts (and films) are feminist. Her first film, a short documentary, El mundo de la mujer/The World of a Woman (1972), features the kinds of goods on display, at the Femimundo exhibition in Buenos Aires, for the consumption of women. Juguetes/Playthings (1978), shot at another trade fair in La Rural de Palermo, criticises gender-role reinforcement in toys for boys and girls. Bemberg's next six films are all features. Below are brief synopses of the narrative action.

In Momentos (1981), Lucía (Graciela Dufau) is a middle-aged, middle-class woman who is weary of her marriage. The narrative charts her meeting and passages of her brief affair with the younger Nicolás (Miguel Ángel Solá). She complains that her life is 'without surprises.' Nicolás pesters Lucía like a child. She eventually succumbs to his entreaties. Once Nicolás and Lucía have slept together, Lucía wants to go away alone, but Nicolás begs her to go away with him, which she does. Eventually she wearies of him too and returns home. She

⁹ In her acts of separation and of divorce, Bemberg defied Argentine social codes. That divorce continued to be an issue in Argentina in the 1980s is demonstrated by the fact that - as part of his election campaign - Raúl Alfonsín supported its liberalisation.

says to Nicolás, 'I want to go home' (she does not say, 'I want to go to my husband'). It becomes clear that she does not know what she wants because she has no choices. The entire narrative is structured as Lucía's flashbacks.

Señora de Nadie (1982) means 'Nobody's Wife.' Again it is structured by the protagonist's flashbacks and again begins with the husband and the home. A wealthy middle-class housewife, Leonora (Luisina Brando), discovers her husband's infidelities. She leaves him and their two small boys. She finds this difficult. She maintains a relationship with her sons and even has a brief affair again with her husband. The film charts her practical struggles to set up on her own. She gets a job as a letting agent and joins a therapy group where she befriends a young gay man, Pablo (Julio Chávez). Leonora sets up home successively with her aunt, her girlfriend and then Pablo. Whilst neither she nor Pablo is successful in his or her respective sexual encounters, platonically, they have each other. The film ends with them laughing together in bed.

Camila (1984), a historical melodrama set in the Argentine 19th century, re-tells the story of Camila O'Gorman (Susú Pecoraro) and her confessor, Ladislao Gutiérrez (Imanol Arias), and their elopement. The historical Camila's father, a supporter of the dictator Rosas, was tenuously associated with their pursuit and eventual execution. In Bemberg's film, Camila seduces the priest, is pregnant when executed, and her father (Héctor Alterio) is her enemy.

¹⁰ Chapter Two will show how marital alienation would become in Bemberg's feature films an autobiographical trope.

Miss Mary (1986), a costume drama, tells the story of a lonely, repressed and repressive governess, the eponymous heroine (Julie Christie). She is an Irish Catholic who has lost her lover in the First World War. Her charges are Johnny (Donald McIntire), fourteen at the film's start, Carolina (Sofia Viruboff), thirteen, and Teresa (Barbara Bunge), eight. Johnny is in love with Miss Mary and Carolina and Teresa are wilful, initially rebelling against her authority: As the children's repressed oppressor - her brief being to guard the girls' sexuality - Miss Mary represents the stultifying effect of British Imperialism on the Argentine upper classes. Nevertheless, she spends one night of passion with Johnny (after, at his coming of age party, he has been expected to sleep with a prostitute) and is expelled from the house. Carolina and Teresa, now attached to her, are devastated. Later, Miss Mary (who has spent the interval teaching in Buenos Aires and is about to return to Ireland, the Great War being over) and Johnny meet up after Miss Mary's clandestine presence at the shotgun wedding of the grown Teresa. The wilful and creative Carolina has gone mad. The entire narrative has been framed by contemporary Argentine political events, beginning with the dictator Uriburu's coup in 1930 and ending on the eve of Perón's release from house arrest in 1945.

Yo, la peor de todas (1990), a historical costume drama, means 'I, the worst woman of all.' It is about the life (1648-1695) of Golden Age poet, Mexican nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Assumpta Serna). It is based upon Octavio Paz's 1982 biography which seeks to explain why she renounced her poetry and ideas, by signing at the end of her life, a confession that she, 'the worst woman of all,' was unworthy. In concentrating on the latter years of Juana's life, the

film charts her relationship with the Spanish vicereine, María Luisa (Dominique Sanda), and suggests what Paz refutes, that - at the least - their relationship was sexually ambiguous. Perhaps significant to this is Juana's close friendship with the (male) homosexual poet, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora (Gerardo Romano).

De eso no se habla (1993) - a 'fabulous' costume drama based on an original surrealist novella by Julio Llinás - means, 'Of this we do not talk.' The narrative begins with the realisation that Doña Leonor (Luisina Brando), a prosperous shopkeeper and widow in small-town Argentina, cannot escape: her daughter, Charlotte (Alejandra Podesta), is a dwarf. Charlotte grows up, and an outsider, handsome Italian, 'complete man,' and teller of exotic tales, Ludovico d'Andrea (Marcello Mastroianni), falls in love with her. They marry and he gives her love and respectability (he is by now the town's mayor), but he cannot bring her happiness. The film ends with Charlotte's escape to the circus that her mother has spent her life keeping at bay, and with the revelation that the mysterious narrator has been Mohamé (Walter Marín), Charlotte's 'Arab' friend, and her mother's shop-boy. The last scenes of this film - of Charlotte's entry into the circus - are filmed from Charlotte's point of view.

These six films make it clear that if Bemberg came to film through her feminism and her love of theatre, she eventually fell in love with film itself. This journey is clear when we compare the feminist didacticism of Momentos to her last film De eso no se habla in which 'the realm of fantasy and spectacle' finds its home in a feminist cinema of 'magic.' Such magic was cut short by Bemberg's death of cancer in 1995. Ever tireless she had completed the script of a seventh

feature, *Un extraño verano/One Strange Summer*. This was an adaptation of Silvina Ocampo's short story *El impostor/The Impostor* (1975, 25-90), whose exploration of the liminal world between waking and dreaming spoke to Bemberg's sense of cinema as visual fantasy.¹¹

2. Feminism

Commensurate with Bemberg's call to theatre had been her call to feminism: 'Feminism is the antidote to machismo and is not a crusade against men. It is the antibody in defence of thinking women - one that gives us a new way of viewing relationships' (in *Revista Antena*, 14 December 1990). John King (2000, 17) says that in Argentina the history of feminism (especially that of the late 1960s and early 1970s when Bemberg became a feminist), unlike that of Britain and the USA, 'has received scant attention.' In Argentina most dissenters have been drawn to social rather than to sexual revolution and the late 1960s and early 1970s were no exception to the general rule.¹² This is indicated in early interviews with Bemberg in which the focus is always the 'shock' of her feminism.¹³ Nevertheless, much early feminism (of the late 19th and early 20th centuries) in Latin America was similar to that in the USA and Europe; thus Bemberg's feminism was preceded in Argentina by a significant first-wave feminist movement (Molyneux 2001, 167). As in Europe, female suffrage was an early demand. Feminist campaigners, however, 'deployed (the) language of difference' (Molyneux 2001, 168), arguing that women's innate qualities of

¹¹ *El impostor* was originally published in Ocampo's 1948 collection, *Autobiografía de Irene*.

¹² In her study of Latin American feminism, Maxine Molyneux (2001, 173) notes that in the 1980s, 'the political and theoretical space was occupied by social movements.' Socially-committed Latin American filmmaking reflects this fact in that traditionally it has excluded the subject of women.

¹³ See Section 6, 'Reception' below.

altruism would improve political life. Thus when the Argentine suffrage law of 1912 denied women the vote, feminists claimed motherhood as a test of loyalty to the state, arguing that mothers bore children and sacrificed their sons to the nation in war. This claim foreshadowed that 'compensatory feminism' that, originating in Uruguay, had become by the 1940s popular throughout the southern-cone countries. This feminism sought to have motherhood recognized and protected in the law, so that feminists were still claiming their rights through their bearing of children for the state. This was not so far removed from the kind of feminism (as a means of enlarging the Peronist vote) that Eva Perón ('Evita') advocated.¹⁴ Maxine Molyneux (2001, 173), however, draws a distinction between the popular women's movements (such as Evita's), and middle-class feminism, in Latin America.¹⁵ If Bemberg's middle-class feminism distinguished itself from claims made by the popular women's movements, it would appear to do so not least in that, in her eyes, motherhood was one of the ways by which women were subjugated.¹⁶

Bemberg had been inspired to follow her voices after reading Simone de Beauvoir.¹⁷ She always maintained that she still loved her husband but her marriage (like her childhood world) had stifled her creativity. Thus immediately

¹⁴ Evita set up the Peronist Women's Party, and addressed women as the 'wives of the soldiers of Perón.' Thus - although she called for women to receive financial reward for their work in the home - hers was a patriarchal feminism. Nevertheless, Evita supported and gained women's enfranchisement in 1947.

¹⁵ Molyneux studies anarchist feminism within the nineteenth-century anarchist movement in Argentina. She suggests that - despite the fact that Argentina was a more secular country than most other countries in Latin America - most women would have been scandalised by the attacks of the anarchist feminist magazine *La Voz de la Mujer* (published nine times in 1896) on the Church and family. Thus the movement failed.

¹⁶ Section 6, 'Reception' - in which are reviews by women - will bear out the differences between Bemberg's and other Argentine women's feminism.

¹⁷ The two books to which Bemberg most frequently alludes in interview are Simone de Beauvoir's *La deuxième sexe/The Second Sex* (1949) and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's*

after their separation Bemberg began an intense reading of feminist literature. This was for her a seminal formation. Next she co-convened a feminist reading group in Buenos Aires.¹⁸ This was in the early 1970s when a popular Argentine slogan was 'Todo es política/All matters are political.' Todo excluded women's issues however. Appropriately the reading group became the Unión Feminista Argentina whose acronym, UFA, as John King points out, means, 'I've had enough' (in King, Whitaker and Bosch 2000, 18).

Thus, apart from her late answer to its call, Bemberg's formation as a second-wave feminist followed the classic path. Argentina did not provide the classic culture for either first-wave, or second-wave, feminism, however. Throughout the 20th century, women writers in Argentina had struggled to make their voices heard, and not least, therefore, to each other. Thus creative women, engaged though they were in a common project against the repressions of patriarchy, experienced an exile redoubled. Symptomatic of their isolation was the fact that the erudite and generous Bemberg seldom talked of them. The only Argentine woman writer of whom my interviewees remember Bemberg talking was Silvina Ocampo (1903-1993). Nevertheless, the lives and projects of some other women writers, such as Victoria Ocampo (1890-1979) and Alfonsina Storni (1892-1938), were close to those of Bemberg.¹⁹ Bemberg's silence about these women

Own (1929). In her first filmscript Bemberg's protagonist - Fina - is seen reading The Second Sex as well as Betty Friedan's key work: The Feminine Mystique (1971).

¹⁸ It is commonly - incorrectly - asserted that Bemberg unilaterally convened this group.

¹⁹ Bemberg intruded into the male world of film as Victoria Ocampo - editor of the literary journal Sur (Buenos Aires), and the most influential woman of letters in twentieth-century Argentina - had intruded into the male world of the essay. There are close similarities in their backgrounds and lives. In the early part of the century, divorce was forbidden, so Ocampo led a clandestine love life until she was in her 30s and became more open about it. Thereafter Ocampo wrote frankly about her continual struggle for control over her own body and desires, stating that whatever she wrote she wanted to write it as a woman. The subsequent growth of feminist criticism has helped to re-instate her in feminist circles, but like Bemberg, she was

reflects a female dislocation in which she speaks a lone voice amongst other lone voices. Nevertheless, isolating though it was, Bemberg's feminism expresses itself wittily. In The Miguens Archive is one of her amusing cartoons entitled An Essay in the Sense (sic) of the Female Sex. It begins with her sketch of a woman washing the globe. The globe then becomes a little man whom the woman pushes across the subsequent pages. Each new page quotes eminent - misogynistic - men like Napoleon, Freud and Goethe. Goethe famously says, 'A man's home is in the world, a woman's world is her home.' On the page where Freud is quoted is a sketch of more little men (more analysts, such as Jung and Lacan etc.) in a chain. They are holding onto each other's penises. The sketched woman, now getting angry, finishes the booklet with her own quoting of 'Feminine culture and masculine culture are not natural.' In her Address to a Girls' School in England (1989), Bemberg says of these words of Goethe that he 'was an excellent poet, but he understood nothing about women. Neither him, nor any man.'²⁰ This document is touching, because there is an intimacy in her address as 'a twentieth-century woman ... to all of you, grown up and still quite small, women of the 21st century.'²¹ She warns them from experience: 'Watch out! Machismo is hard to destroy, as much in women as in men. My most

dismissed at home by younger and more radical generations as a cultural 'oligarch.' Unlike Bemberg, she did defend the cultural values of the liberal aristocrat tradition, but like Bemberg, saw (criticizing the fact) that its power was male.

Alfonsina Storni comes from a different (lower-class) background. What links her and Bemberg is a witty look at the relationship between the sexes, and the sense of being on the outside. Storni was an outsider - having had a son outside of wedlock - who, as a successful woman, nevertheless had to struggle economically. Her poems deal in the relationship between the sexes. There is an irony undercutting her romantic voice, particularly an ironic portrayal of masculinity, which lightens the tone of some of her poems, which - written to a male interlocutor - explore the pain attendant on a subordinate female position. La loba/The She-Wolf is an outcast who confronts but does not threaten the flock that remains vulnerable in its dependence on a male shepherd. The sense of being outside is therefore linked in some way to Storni's position as a liberated woman. This would have spoken to Bemberg.

²⁰ Bemberg was invited to the school as part of her visit to England when she came to address the symposium of Latin American artists at Leeds Castle, May 1989.

²¹ See footnote 6.

fervent desire is that you be strong and free. You are the new women and this violent world is calling you.'

It was not only as a woman, but as an artist that Bemberg had felt the connection between public and private violence in Argentina. With the inception in 1976 of the military dictatorship (discussed below) the UFA disbanded. In this political climate Bemberg took her feminism to film. In 1978 in military and misogynist Buenos Aires Bemberg was, however, in neither a good moment nor a good place in which to begin making feminist films. Nevertheless, whilst the conjuncture of bad time and bad place would surface in the critical reception of her work, the meeting of her feminism with dictatorship would mould her film work.

3. Dictatorship, Culture and Censorship

Bemberg's first two feature films were made during a brutal military dictatorship, the so-called 'Dirty War' of 1976 to 1983, where ideas, such as feminism, and people that were perceived as a threat to the military machine, were 'disappeared.'²² Bemberg's final four films were made in the period of restored democracy. In this time the people of Argentina witnessed the trial of the generals who had headed this Dirty War. They endured their public refusals of the guilt of torturing and of murdering, on the one hand, and re-lived the pain of the 'disappearance' of (many thousands) of loved ones, on the other. What could not be talked about in the first three years of Bemberg's film production was excavated for public witness in the subsequent three. The documented

result was The Report of the Commission on the Disappeared: Nunca más/Never Again (1984) marks the definitive official confirmation of what, for want of better words, constituted a 'cleansing' in Argentina.²³ This 'cleansing,' sanctioned by the Catholic Church, is the ultimate in the expression of patriarchal repression. Bemberg's filmmaking shines out in the shadow of these events. In all of Bemberg's films that repressive force and logic which allowed the military machine to 'disappear' the other is implicated in the patriarchal repression of the feminine in home and state, and her later films increasingly if allusively talk about the inadmissible: that censorship enacts many kinds of 'disappearance' in Argentina: 'We Don't Talk About That.' Thus the films suggest wider than just feminist questions of political liberty.

Furthermore, the Dirty War was merely culmination of much political violence and military dictatorship to which Bemberg's twentieth-century life bore witness. In 1930 (eight years after Bemberg was born), an army coup led by General Uriburu inaugurated the 'infamous decade,' in which a small group of conservatives maintained power by falsifying elections and by prohibiting other political parties.²⁴ In June 1943, they in turn were deposed by a coup d'état that inaugurated the rule of Generals Ramírez and Farrell and the eventual election of army general Juan Domingo Perón to the presidency in February 1946. In 1946, Argentina changed. Perón and his followers in the trade unions, the peronistas.

²² The Spanish verb 'to disappear' has acquired grammatical flexibility. It is now transitive (as well as intransitive) verb and has become a substantive also. Thus one can both disappear another person, and one can become a 'disappeared.'

²³ Nunca más listed 8,960 cases of disappearance based on testimony given to the Commission. The actual figure is thought by the Commission to have been much higher, since many of the victims had no witnesses to their fate. Furthermore, some potential witnesses were still afraid to offer information.

²⁴ One of these conservatives is represented in Miss Mary by the father, Alfredo Martínez-Bordagain.

were committed to social reform and industrialisation. Thus the Peronist years 1946-1955 constituted an assault on those aristocratic, liberal European values with which the Bemberg family were associated, whilst Perón's actress wife Evita (as Chapter Seven will show) became target for upper-class scorn.²⁵

The 1960s continued turbulent, although liberals and intellectuals were happier with Frondizi (the Radical party leader who had been elected to the Presidency in 1958 and who remained in power until 1962). His elected successor, President Illia, was, however, deposed by General Onganía's coup of 1966. This coup opened a period of military dictatorship that (excepting the brief Peronist interval 1973-76) lasted until 1983. In 1973 Perón returned from exile for a few months, but died, leaving his government to his second wife, Isabelita. Her rule was a failure. From 1974, until the military coup of March 1976, there were struggles for power in the union movement and inflation spiraled out of control. Argentina was plagued by the terrorist activities of the Peronist Montoneros and the ERP (The Peoples' Revolutionary Army) on the left, and by the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance (the Triple A right wing death squads linked to the federal police) on the right. The latter used terrorist strategies to subdue many left-wing filmmakers, as we shall see.

Nevertheless, in the early 1960s under Frondizi and Illia (during which Bemberg was making her first forays into the theatre), Buenos Aires had been a vibrant artistic centre of a radical aestheticism. Silvia Sigal (1991, 193) suggests the

²⁵ John King (in King, Whitaker and Bosch 2000, 12) cites a personal confrontation between Otto Sebastián Bemberg and Perón. Bemberg herself was an anti-peronist (as signified by the fact that the young Miguens family lived in Spain between 1953-1955, thereby positioning themselves against Perón).

appearance of the weekly news magazine Primera Plana in 1962 coincided with the installation of new times in the Argentine cultural space. Now intellectuals in Argentina, inspired by the Cuban revolution of 1959, became open to Latin America rather than to Europe solely. The novelist Julio Cortázar was important as a cultural sign of the times. Everyone was reading his Rayuela/Hopscotch (1963), which, according to Sigal, was his challenge to the distinction set up in Primera Plana between arts and politics. Furthermore, Cortázar's subject matter, dealing with the fantastic erupting into the everyday, attracted international as well as Argentine film directors.²⁶ Similarly, plastic art was strongly influenced by surrealism. Art critic, Jorge Glusberg (in Elliot 1994, 69), says of Argentine artists of this time that owing to surrealism's influence they now 'concentrated on the materials of their art and on gesture to reveal the hidden treasures of the unconscious.'

For the first time the young could be young and not mere imitations of their elegant parents (King 1994, 68). They could come together in the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella (ITDT), founded in 1958, which gave new space to visual, audiovisual, theatrical and musical artists of the avant-garde, both national and international. At the ITDT Arts Centre in Calle Florida new musical technologies were explored, and jazz, blues, pop and folk concerts (the latter showcasing singers like Jorge de la Vega and Nacha Guevara), were a regular feature. The work of domestic playwrights like Griselda Gambaro was performed here as well as that of the international avant-garde like Osborne, Pinter, and Beckett. Furthermore, the Di Tella institute provided a forum for

²⁶ Antonioni's Blowup (United Kingdom, 1966) is taken from the same book of Cortázar's short stories as Manuel Antin's La cifra impar/The Odd Number (Argentina, 1962).

many domestic women artists and practitioners such as Marta Minujín, Dalila Puzzovia and Susana Salgado, all of whom received its awards. It was popular. In 1967 it received 159,287 visitors. Lawrence Alloway (pop's theorist and guru) testified that it had one of the most developed avant-garde movements in the world. That it was progressive is evidenced in some conservative reviews. In 1964, Gambaro's El desatino/Folly was denigrated in El Mundo as 'pornography and associated things', and Hoy en la Cultura pronounced that 'Folly honours its name' (in King 1994, 71).

Nevertheless, Onganía's coup demonstrated that if these things were tolerated by those who did not celebrate them, reaction was building. With President Illia's deposition in 1966, Onganía reported that 'we will not allow extremisms of any kind to haunt our youth.' At this moment creative aestheticism was interrupted. In order to exalt 'the virtues of the nation, of the family and of civil order' (King in Elliot 1994, 73) all constitutional protections against censorship were eliminated. In 1968, law 18,019 set up the Board of Censors (including the Board of Film Control) with the aim of 'protecting the nation's moral well-being ...,' listing a series of prohibitions including adultery, abortion, and sexual perversion. This year, with violence erupting in the streets (which, gaining in intensity, led to Perón's return in 1973), also saw the beginnings of police raids on the Di Tella institute that culminated in its closure in May 1970. This closure presaged wider intellectual censorship: When (just prior to Perón's return) the military fully implemented the 1967 Krieger Vasena (economic) plan, the unions and intellectuals objected, and so university activities were restricted and theatres were closed 'to safeguard morals.' Nevertheless, it was not until the

Dirty War that the full logic of Onganía's censorship law was implemented. Books were burned 'in the best traditions of the Inquisition' (Caistor 1987, 84), publishers were harassed and some were closed down (events to which both Camila and De eso no se habla would allude). Between 1976 and 1978, a total of 180 films are calculated to have been banned by the Board of Film Control, on either political or moral grounds (Caistor 1987, 87-88). Bemberg's films were made when the sense of repression during the Dirty War was acute in that it followed that time of cultural expansion in the 1960s.

Because the artistic optimism of the 1960s did not last, Bemberg's sensual, hyper-realist and 'magical-realist' art can be read, I posit, as an attempt to recover its liberties and sensualities. At the same time the general relaxation of censorship (beginning in the early 1980s) is indicated in the fact that Momentos and Señora de Nadie (dealing as they do in marital infidelity) could be made at all. Such films would have been impossible in 1976 or 1977. These films coincide with the actors and playwrights (notably those associated with the radical Teatro Abierto) returning from exile in the early 1980s.²⁷ Griselda Gambaro herself returned in 1980.²⁸ This hesitant confidence is indicated in the inauguration of a new cinema review, Cine Boletín, whose first edition appeared in March 1981.²⁹ There was a further relaxation of censorship resulting from the

²⁷ Teatro Abierto was opened in 1981 by 21 theatre directors, actors and promoters. Their idea was to stage a festival which welcomed theatre artists of all political creeds. They took hope from their strength in numbers. The Picadero Theatre where Roberto Cossa's Gris de ausencia/Greyness of Absence (1981) was being performed was firebombed and badly damaged. The company found another theatre, however: They staged a successful festival, which provided one more indication that by now the military were facing failure.

²⁸ Censorship explains Bemberg's silence over the work of Griselda Gambaro (1928-). Gambaro's plays - likewise dealing in the Argentine people's complicity in disappearances and torture - had all been censored.

²⁹ Cine Boletín's first editorial (page 6) alludes to the country's troubles and to cinema's responsibility to face them, but it does so euphemistically. It exhorts 'all (workers in the film

Malvinas defeat, but it was not until after the end of the Dirty War (with the election of Raúl Alfonsín in 1983) that it became clear that 'there had been a real plan of ideological cleansing prepared by civil and military intelligence services, based in the ministry of Education and Culture, initiated in 1976 and known as Operation Clarity' (Torrents 1987, 91). This involved the blacklisting, and targeting for 'disappearing,' of artists. In May 1976, the director Raymundo Gleyser and writer and screenwriter Rodolfo Walsh had 'disappeared.' Walsh vanished shortly after his Open Letter to the military denouncing their policy of disappearances. 'After that writers knew what to expect if they told the truth and published it inside Argentina' (Martin 1998, 216). Thus - of significance to Chapter Four's discussions of De eso no se habla is that - euphemisms in Argentine art had become a matter of expedience during the military dictatorship.

Bemberg's later films increasingly, albeit allusively, do talk - 'de eso se habla' - about the inadmissible: that censorship carries resonances of many kinds of 'disappearance' in Argentina: 'de eso no se habla.' Such a trajectory (of a feminism that increasingly embraces wider political issues) was earlier mirrored in the work of Elena Walsh whose own lightheartedness disappeared at the beginning of the Dirty War with Chauca y palito/Nickel and Dime (1977). As both Bemberg and Walsh began to argue more directly in favour of social justice and for a greater tolerance of all difference, they increasingly suggested that the failure to speak out against the dictatorship was complicity with repression.

industry ... to) understand that the problem that confronts (Argentine) cinema as industry and as culture, is related to the general problems of the nation ... that the defense of Argentine cinema is the defense of the social and cultural patrimony of the country.'

(Diane Taylor's Disappearing Acts (1997) discusses this complicity when, at the moment of a person's arrest by the military, witnesses looked the other way.) Bemberg used Walsh's feminist lyrics Mi propia mujer/My Own Woman for the closing credit sequence in Señora de Nadie. Thus, as Catherine Grant (2000, 95) points out, Bemberg is (early) announcing her identification with Walsh's call (notably in 'Desventuras en el País-Jardín-de-Infantes/Misadventures in Kindergarten Country', published in Clarín (17 August 1979) for more honesty and artistic freedom.

The following chapters will discuss the flaunting of Bemberg's female protagonists in the faces of previous censorships and of her own identity and self-censorship. Chapters Three and Four respectively will explore how Camila and De eso no se habla come close (if allusively) to denunciations of Argentina's bloody history. Camila neatly encapsulates the analogy between public and private 'disappearings' and thereby speaks what De eso no se habla denounces as 'unspeakable.' Camila was filmed in the last year of the dictatorship and released under restored democracy. The film's treatment of the hounding and final execution of this historical woman who transgressed Father, Church and State by eloping with a priest, resonated powerfully in the hearts and minds of all those Argentines whose loved ones had been 'disappeared' by the military state. As John King (1990, 96) puts it: 'Camila ... allowed the Argentine audience a form of collective catharsis ... Over two million people wept at the story of Camila O'Gorman, which was their own story.'

4. Argentine Cinema

Into what kind of film culture and industry was Bemberg's cinema intervening? With many actors and directors in exile, and others blacklisted, comedies and other 'safe' themes had become, in the early 1980s, the staple of domestic film production, while, because the military junta favoured foreign films, there was a glut of US titles. Therefore, it was not just the number but the quality and kind of films that had been severely affected by the junta and thus 'cinema diminished in national importance in the late 1970s' (López 1987, 74). Such diminishment was aided by competition from the increasing TV market and a decrease in purchasing power owing to inflation and subsequent wage freezes. Not until Alfonsín scrapped the Board of Film Control, and complete freedom from censorship was promised for newspapers, books, television and radio, could cinema begin to revive and put itself in the vanguard of exposing the atrocities of the Dirty War. Shot before Alfonsín's election, Camila anticipated the new freedoms.

Nevertheless, and despite increasing censorship, Bemberg's filmmaking was preceded in the years 1955-1976 by what Ana López (1987, 73) argues were 'the (two) most influential decades of Argentine cinema.'³⁰ López cites the socially-conscious documentary work of Fernando Birri alongside the cinema d'auteur of the New Wave directors, as examples of the 'outstanding' heterogeneity of Argentine cinema in the 1960s and 1970s. Fernando Birri, founder of the Escuela Documental/Documentary Filmmaking School in Santa Fe prophesied: 'There will be no lasting revolution without revolutionising language.' Such

manifestos, however, continued to exclude women and a feminist language from film, as did the films of the New Wave. The New Wave filmmakers included Simón Feldman, José A. Martínez Suárez, Manuel Antín, David José Kohon and Rodolfo Kuhn, whose films became a vehicle of self-expression (in which as for the directors of the European New Wave, male friendship was an important theme). These filmmakers had been inspired by Leopoldo Torre Nilsson and Fernando Ayala, who already were producing an intellectualised cinema for a privileged Argentine urban élite. In Ayala's Paula cautiva/Paula. The Captive (1963) and Torre Nilsson's La casa del ángel/House of the Angel (1957), there was respectively a sumptuous aesthetic depicting a splendid decaying aristocratic world, and a languorous film style informed by such European arthouse directors as Bergman. Torre Nilsson's film suggested the suffocating constrictions (its sexual mores and hypocrisy) of a girl's class. Likewise his La caída/The Fall (1959) deals in the contradictions and decline of the Argentine upper class and genteel bourgeois society (a theme that Bemberg would develop in Miss Marv). At the same time, Ayala's El jefe/The Boss (1958) was symptomatic of those films that - directly critical of Peronism - express the mood of change in late 1950s and early 1960s Argentina, especially the mood of the political optimism of the middle classes under Frondizi. There was an unforeseen irony about this optimism.

Firstly, the Peronist militant films of the Cine Liberación Group brushed the 'New Wave' aside. These films, such as Fernando Solanas' and Octavio Getino's La hora de los hornos/The Hour of the Furnaces (1966-1968),

³⁰ Filmmakers were encouraged by the Cinema Law of 1957, the Decreto Ley 62-57, in force until 1973, which provided up to fifty per cent funding for any one film. This meant that

inaugurated Third Cinema debates and were the most famous Argentine films internationally. These debates were characterised by a social/socialist project (to empower the dispossessed) and by not only neo-realist subject matter, but by neo-realist forms. To that end they employed non-professional actors, and filmed on location with hand-held cameras. The ITDT Arts Centre itself was pilloried in The Hour of the Furnaces. Early in the film is inserted footage that (in context) disparages its 'decadent' young visitors who are listening to European pop. These bourgeois art lovers are explicitly linked with a decadent aristocracy, so that art lovers of Bemberg's class were singled out for disdain. After its initial textual slogans declaring war (beginning as small white dots in the centre of the screen, fanning out in strobe effect to its front and edges and set against drum beats that get progressively louder), the film's first voice-over declares: 'For the ruling class, a war of oppression. For the oppressed peoples, a war of liberation.' Bemberg's position at this time (as an aristocrat, but feminist who could hardly be associated with the ruling class' exaltation of the nation and the family) must have felt contradictory. However, and secondly, although between 1973 (the return of Perón, and Octavio Getino's liberalisation of censorship as head of the state censorship board) and 1974, there had been a temporary (but great) increase in film production, especially in those films expressing a third-world populism, this 'movement' was wiped out by the dictatorship.³¹ The three main members of the Cine Liberación Group went into exile after Gerardo Vallejo's house was bombed. Fernando Solanas went to France, Octavio Getino went to Peru and Vallejo went to Panama. Even Torre

directors could become their own producers.

³¹ Further examples of this third-world populism are the anti-imperialist La Patagonia rebelde/Rebellion in Patagonia (Héctor Olivera, 1974), denouncing British control in the south

Nilsson (who was not politically committed) chose exile, and so began the temporary decline in Argentine cinema.

Finally, all of these examples of Bemberg's predecessors and contemporaries indicate that filmmaking in Argentina was and (still is) the preserve of the man.³² The low proportion of female to male filmmakers worldwide is even lower in Argentina - a country that has a prestigious and large cinematic industry and history.³³ A collation of entries in all dictionaries gives a total of eight women of 167 Argentine filmmakers listed up to two years after Bemberg's last film in 1995.³⁴ These include Nelly Kaplan, working in France and Jeanine Meerapfel, working in Germany. With John King's (1989) and Luis Trelles Plazaola's (1992) additions, only fourteen women filmmakers are documented since the inception of cinema in Argentina in 1900. Whilst Kaplan and Meerapfel receive critical attention in France and Germany respectively, Bemberg's six female predecessors and seven female contemporaries were and continue to be neglected by Argentine critics of film. As the only woman

of Argentina in the 1920s, and *Quebracho* (Ricardo Wullicher, 1974), dealing in worker's struggles against British interests in the first half of the century.

³² Symptomatic of such a failure of recognition are the missing entries - of women's filmmaking - in Argentine dictionaries. Only three books in the library of Argentina's *Escuela Nacional del Cine/National Film School* contain information on women directors. These are those of Kriger and Portela (1997), Martín (1987) and Trelles Plazaola (1992). They do not agree on names and numbers. My total of seven women filmmakers (up to 1997) is arrived at by collating information from all sources. No lists could be accessed beyond this date, although there are several women directors working presently in Argentina.

³³ It is worth noting that in Clara Kriger and Alejandra Portela's (1997) dictionary of Latin American directors, the Argentina section, pages 11-184, dwarfs all the other sections.

³⁴ One of these women filmmakers is Eva Landeck who - having made six shorts and three features - is the only filmmaker to stand some kind of comparison with Bemberg. But although Landeck made some of her films in Buenos Aires, she was a Uruguayan citizen. John King (in Bassnett 1990, 158-159) names five further women (all of them Bemberg's predecessors), two of whose prints of silent film have not survived: Emilia Saleny (*Clarita*, 1919) and María Celestini (*Mi Derecho/My Right*, 1920). The other women are Elena de Azcuénaga and Dolly Pussi - eminent female documentary filmmakers of the 1960s. King also names Narcisca Hirsch as one other feature filmmaker. Finally, Luis Trelles Plazaola's book (1991), on five Latin American women directors working in Europe, discusses Kaplan and Meerapfel.

consistently recorded in lists of Argentine filmmakers, Bemberg's feminism rightly addressed the censorship of women.

Bemberg's less popular contemporaries include her producer, Lita Stantic (1941-), who made her first and only film, Un muro de silencio/A Wall of Silence, in 1992. This deals with the question of the disappearances. Clara Zappettini (no dates given), a documentary filmmaker, worked on Camila as an assistant director.³⁵ At the time of the dictionaries' compilations (1997), Mercedes Frutos (1947-) had made five shorts before her two listed features, Otra esperanza/Another Hope (1984) and Debajo del mundo/Underneath the World (1986).³⁶ It is no surprise that Bemberg's contemporaries have close connections with her in an embattled world of female filmmaking. That world (we have seen) was rendered the more difficult for Bemberg in that her subject matter made an upper-class intervention into a film culture whose socialist project did not embrace the theme of women.

Thus, when in 1984, Camila broke all box office records, and when it was nominated for an Oscar for Best Foreign Film, Bemberg set the scene for a reassessment and redefinition of Latin American cinema. As the final part of this chapter elaborates, this was eventually recognized by the press at home, so that 'Camila inaugurated a new cinema' (Última Hora, 3 November 1986). This cinema was one that whilst speaking of grave matters indeed could compete on

³⁵ The International Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com>) does not give biographical dates for Zappettini, Azcuénaga, Celestini, Landeck, Pussi or Saleny. However, Pussi and Landeck have entries: Pussi's last entry was for 1989 as production manager for Verano del potro/Summer of the Colt (André Mélancon, Argentina/Canada), and Landeck's last entry was for 1979 as director for Sitio del humo/Place of Smoke (Uruguay). (IMDB last accessed 20 July 2003.)

its own terms with Hollywood and was one that could be directed by women. Such inauguration, however, was not critically celebrated at the time.

5. Bemberg's Filmmaking

A. Bemberg's Practice

The aristocratic Bemberg disturbed Argentine film culture in 1981 with her first feature, Momentos. It may have been made with her own money, but it recouped its costs. Four subsequent films were paid for from the profits of the preceeding one. Lita Stantic (Bemberg's producer) had to find money for Yo, la peor de todas only, because Miss Mary (exceptionally) was not a financial success. (Possible reasons for this will be discussed below.) Free from the start of financial constraint and patronage, Bemberg could choose her own team. Stantic suggested that especially in the early days of her filmmaking, Bemberg did not trust men. She wanted a woman producer. She felt at that time (moderating her views later) that the world of women was more honest. Thus many women, such as Margarita Jusid and Graciela Galán as well as Lita Stantic, worked on her teams, which, nevertheless, included some men. Miguel Rodríguez featured as cinematographer for her first two films and for Miss Mary. Another fruitful collaboration - in composing the first version of the screenplay for Camila - was that between Bemberg, and Beda Docampo Feijoo and Juan Bautista. As her expertise developed, Bemberg augmented a distinguished core team that included many men. Félix Monti, her cinematographer on Yo, la peor de todas and De eso no se habla, and Jorge

³⁶ Underneath the World is scripted by the team - Beda Docampo Feijoo and Juan Bautista Stagnaro - who worked with Bemberg on the script of Camila.

Goldenberg, her co-scriptwriter on Miss Mary and De eso no se habla are sought-after Latin American practitioners.³⁷

A core team in which this thesis is most interested was formed between Bemberg, Graciela Galán, Bemberg's costume designer for her last four films, and Bemberg's favourite actress, Luisina Brando. Costume was of the essence for Bemberg. By the time that she had established herself as a filmmaker of repute, she elected a top designer in Buenos Aires: one of the most sought after in the world. Galán, designer for the Paris Opera, was wardrobe designer for the two final films in which Brando starred for Bemberg.³⁸ Brando was an early choice for Bemberg who said, 'I choose my actresses ... especially for the expressiveness of their face. Luisina Brando has a mobility which enables her to evoke different moods brilliantly' (in La Plata, 29 November 1981). The textual analysis of Chapter Two will show that it is Brando's ability to portray a weary sadness that is most important to this film's compassionate understanding of a woman who dare transgress the rules of patriarchy by leaving her man and children. In the three Bemberg films in which Brando features, and in the course of which she matured from young to middle-aged actress, she increasingly performs a glamorous and comic femininity. Chapter Seven will argue that in Galán's costumes and under Bemberg's direction, Brando's expressive acting achieved a comic refinement that is evident in no other of her film roles.

³⁷ Goldenberg was one of the founder practitioners of Fernando Birri's (neo-realist) programme at the Escuela Documental in Santa Fe. He - and Lita Stantic (possibly the closest associate of Bemberg) - have strong left-wing credentials.

³⁸ As an instance of Galán's importance to Bemberg's projects, she accompanied Bemberg - in the pre-shooting phase of Yo, la peor de todas - on a two-month research trip to Mexico.

How did Bemberg work with her teams? If money did not constrain Bemberg, there was a sense in which (as a late starter) time did. She worked exceptionally hard. All of her collaborators agree that she was consistently professional.³⁹ She was strict and obsessive but courteous and kind. She was the first to arrive on set and the last to go. She knew everybody's names by the second day of working with them. Lita Stantic talked particularly of their good, equitable, working relationship, notwithstanding that (corroborated in interview by Félix Monti) Bemberg was fiercely independent, and strong in her point of view. Her determination is evidenced by the fact that Bemberg appears to have read all of her film books (about eighty of them, bequeathed to Mercedes García Guevara). Many of them are closely annotated. Whilst these comprise books on Hollywood, and on filmmakers like Fellini and Bresson, most are technical books about cameras, lenses and lighting. It is clear that Bemberg wanted to master the minutiae of her craft. Not happy to leave anything to the men, the independence of her protagonists is reflected in Bemberg's working life. If in all production phases - of scripting, shooting and editing - Bemberg maintained control, the aesthetic of her films is her own. The determination to craft her own films was indicated most of all by Bemberg's practice of editing. Bemberg (like many auteurs) liked editing most of all and never let her editor work alone. We can therefore with justice talk of her as an auteur, with a high degree of control over her work and therefore over the femininity - and look - that she constructed.⁴⁰

³⁹ Patricia Maldonado said (Buenos Aires, 29 August 2000) that whilst Bemberg's intestinal illness 'was terrible, she was very strong, and never stopped working.' Bemberg was ill for five years, and extremely ill for the last year.

⁴⁰ Feminist film theory calls to practitioners to counter the dominant male voyeuristic spectatorial gaze. It is largely editing - which, according to her collaborators, Bemberg talked of as putting a jigsaw together - that controls the point of view.

B. The Filmic and Aesthetic 'Influences' on Bemberg's Work

What may we say were the filmic and other aesthetic training towards that construction? Bemberg (not known for her ungenerosity of spirit) did not talk with her collaborators of other Argentine women directors.⁴¹ This is not symptomatic of their critical neglect merely. Bemberg did not go to school. As an autodidact, she learned from other filmmakers. She went to the cinema nearly every afternoon, usually alone. There she would learn from the prominent male European 'art' directors, like Bresson, Fellini and Bergman. Bemberg is unusual in acknowledging these teachers. Of them all, she declared herself Robert Bresson's disciple: 'He was my spiritual father.' He was 'the one who influenced me most, his words in - Notes on Cinematography (1977) - his book is all torn because I still read it constantly when I start a film' (in Burton-Carvajal 1995, 31).⁴² She particularly notes Bresson's advice, 'Try to show something that - without you - nobody would know' (in Burton-Carvajal 1995, 40). Interviews with Bemberg's collaborators suggested two other preferred directors were Visconti (whose sumptuousness must have appealed to Bemberg) and Kieslowski. Lita Stantic was, however, convinced that Fellini was Bemberg's favourite director (Chapter Four will note Fellini's mark on Bemberg's final film), and that Bergman was a close second.⁴³ Bemberg is not

⁴¹ Clara Fontana (Buenos Aires, 4 September 2000) suggested that the few Argentine women directors cited above in Section 4 may have/have had feminist feelings in their films, but that it is not conscious. They were conventional, and Bemberg was not conventional. She was sure that they would not have had an influence on Bemberg 'who was feminist in a purist sense.'

⁴² Although many of these statements - now translated into English - are in Burton-Carvajal's 'María Luisa Bemberg's Miss Marv: Fragments of a Life and Career History', (in Jaffe and Robin 1991, 331-352), I translate the original Spanish and some other statements from Burton-Carvajal's unpublished document, Abrir puertas y ventanas: Mosaico testimonial de la vida y carrera de María Luisa Bemberg (1995). This is a posthumous testimonial composite. I am grateful to the author for permission to quote from it.

⁴³ To a questionnaire for an un-referenced newspaper (see Appendix 5, Fig.A5.20), Bemberg names only Fellini as her favourite director. The question, 'Who are your favourite film directors?' gives her the option of naming more than one.

the only woman filmmaker to acknowledge Bergman as a great influence. Whether Bergman was a direct influence on Bemberg's filmmaking is hard to ascertain. Jorge Goldenberg suggested that - because Bemberg's mind was more concrete than abstract - Bergman's 'influence' was formal. Certainly critics like Catherine Grant (2000, 86) note some of his film style - long silences, the melodramatic use of non-diegetic music, a slow-moving camera and the use of the long close up on the female protagonist - mirrored in Bemberg's early, melancholic, films. Whilst Bemberg attested to liking Bergman because he deals with soul, she felt, however, that he was not a help to women (in Burton-Carvajal 1995, 31).

Bemberg's collaborators seem unclear that she gained any 'training' from international women directors. Nevertheless, Bemberg talked of Chantal Akerman, whom she admired. There is also an interview in Tiempo Cotidiano where Bemberg states that Vera Chytilova's films made her 'leave the cinema with giant steps.'⁴⁴ In the Daily News (9 September 1994), Bemberg speaks of Wertmuller, Cavani and Margarethe von Trotta. Of Cavani she says that 'She interests me the least. The only work of hers that I really like is Portiere di notte/The Night Porter (Italy/USA, 1974), despite the fact that in it she replays the sadomasochistic relationship between man and woman.' If Wertmuller's work intrigues her, she does not like it. Il Resto De Gerluio (Venice, 9 March 1993) reports an interview in which Bemberg says of Wertmuller, 'whom I esteem as a director,' that she 'directs erotic scenes that show no understanding of, or solidarity with, women ... her sensibility, in other words, is a long way

⁴⁴ Un-dated in The Miguens Archive.

from mine.' Of the three directors, she is, she confesses, most interested by von Trotta (to whom she makes the most consistent reference in all interviews and whom she always praises). This is because 'she speaks the language of ideology through the language of emotion so well, and that for me is the most effective language' (in Burton-Carvajal 1995, 32). There is a kinship of concern as well as of style between von Trotta and Bemberg. Both directors make classic narrative/melodramatic films. Their protagonists are always intellectual women. Significantly, von Trotta also owes a formal debt to Bergman. Hence the iconography of writing features in all of their films. The brief discussions of affinities between Bemberg and the more serious von Trotta in Chapters Three, Five and Seven (and in Appendix Six) will, however, point up their difference and comment on the visual idiosyncracies of Bemberg's feminist practice.

Bemberg (1989) frequently used a terminology of vision: 'the eye comprehends in a moment ... it can synthesise ... My childhood's restriction of horizons (has resulted) in my new organization of space.'⁴⁵ She intuited that lighting was as important here as composition.⁴⁶ Her sensitivity to light is part of her strong aesthetic sense (it would be possible to freeze many moments in her films and find the formal composure of a painting), evidenced in her significant collection of paintings.⁴⁷ Her art collection was so important to her that it was 'her fifth child.' The catalogue of paintings (mostly contemporary) that she donated to the

⁴⁵ Here I translate from the original manuscript of *Being an Artist in Latin America*.

⁴⁶ Félix Monti (Buenos Aires, 25 August 2000) suggested that to Bemberg lighting was the *mise-en-scène*.

⁴⁷ Bemberg had brightly coloured tapestries on her walls. Her flat was full of flowers that always matched the colour of her curtains.

Museo de Bellas Artes is revealing.⁴⁸ One, a series named Three Women on a Trapeze by Silvina Beriguna (1940-), comprises amusing cartoons of three fat women having a good time. Another artist she collected was Emilio Pettoruti (1892-1971), a cubist, whose paintings are stylized and abstract and who worked in bright colours. His many paintings of harlequins accord with Bemberg's love of carnival, circus and dressing up. Most prominent in the collection, however, is the work of Argentine artist Xul Solar (1887-1963).⁴⁹ Bemberg's love of Xul is symptomatic of their shared and particular humour. This is a visual humour in which the splash of bright colour is blended with serious concerns.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Artists in Bemberg's collection include: Xul Solar (1887-1963); Emilio Pettoruti (1892-1971); Alicia Peñalba (1913-1982); Pedro Figári (1861-1938); Sergio de Castro (1922-); Rafael Barradas (1890-1929); Aquiles Badri (1894-1976) and Silvina Beriguna (1940-).

⁴⁹ Xul Solar was born in Buenos Aires. His wider life and concerns - three of which Beatriz Sarlo (1994, 34) talks - chime with some of Bemberg's: In the 1920s the Argentine vanguard (along with Borges, Emilio Pettoruti etc.) turned on three principles: nationality and the cultural heritage; a necessity to define a relationship with western art and literature; to find a form to separate Argentina's literary past from realist and socialist contemporary art. The first concern echoes with Bemberg's awareness of her position on the edge and the latter two with her quest to make her own new political art. Xul and Bemberg are not unusual in asking what it is to be Argentine. Both Xul and Jorge Luis Borges (his good friend) were preoccupied with the paradox of 'national universalism' (Sarlo 1994, 36). Sarlo suggests Xul situates his work as a reply to the question concerning 'nationality and the construction of culture in a country on the edge' (1994, 38). He and Borges made up languages. We can read into this 'a conflict surrounding the mix of races' (Sarlo 1994, 35). The other component of which Sarlo talks is that of magic (1994, 38). Although Bemberg does not explore magic, its mode - as Chapter Four will discuss - inflects her last film and last filmscript, and would not appear unusual to an Argentine audience whose experience of artistic culture in the first half of the 20th century was one in which magical graphic elements co-existed in the urban space.

⁵⁰ Xul's Maestro (1912-1916), an early composition, is exemplary for its exuberant use of colour. It is vivid with pinks, oranges and especially yellows. Because it is people who drive the humour, their settings (as indicative of their formation) are important. Xul's human personalities always feature in strange positions and places - perched on broken pyramids and ladders etc. The potential wildness of this is tempered with a note of melancholy as in Dos parejas/Two Couples (1924), which is light, subtle, and underplayed. This melancholy (akin to that of Bemberg) gives Xul's paintings their tender, almost spiritual dimension. The result is whimsical and idiosyncratic. The clearest example of this is in Mestizo avión, mestizo humano/Part Aeroplane, Part Human (1936). Here flying machines that comically are part people are wrapped in a yellow hazy glow and thereby elevated into suggestions of a spiritual world. Such elevation (Chapters Four and Seven will argue) gives a moral weight to Bemberg's visual comedy too. Bemberg's admiration of Xul Solar is further significant to Chapter Four's contention that De eso no se habla has a multi-sensory aesthetic. Cinco melodías/Five Melodies (1949) and Coral Bach/Choral Bach (1950) demonstrate Xul's interest in establishing a correspondence between chromatic and musical harmonies.

If Bemberg's films are bright with colour, their sense of sparing sumptuousness shows, however, that she 'learned that in cinema - as in poetry - you had to keep only the essential, ' "to get to the bone," as Ezra Pound said' (in Burton-Carvajal 1995, 39). According to Stantic and Monti, Bemberg did not need to storyboard because every frame was clear in her mind. In place of shooting scripts the archive has plans of action for shooting. Nevertheless, Bemberg's many simple sketches from the pre-production phases show that no element was superfluous.⁵¹ This sense of the evocative power in simple things extended to sound. Analysis will reveal that (despite Félix Monti's assertions) Bemberg's aesthetic sense was multi-sensory, and that in her films - and within every scene - it is sound as much as lighting and composition that works to maintain their coherent tone.⁵² Mercedes García Guevara recounted a revealing anecdote. For the outdoor scenes in *De eso no se habla*, Bemberg wanted the sound of (not any bird but) a particular afternoon bird that sings in Argentina and Uruguay.⁵³ This was a bird from her childhood and illustrates what Bemberg meant when she talked to Guevara about how sound made you *feel*.

6. Reception

A. The Domestic Response

If Bemberg was in control of all production phases, and the aesthetic and feel of her films, she could not be in control of the critical culture that received them.

⁵¹ Mercedes García Guevara (Buenos Aires, 31 August 2000) said that on the twice-weekly boat journeys over to Uruguay when they were shooting *De eso no se habla*, Bemberg would feverishly draw her sketches.

⁵² See footnote 46.

⁵³ Guevara herself has 'no idea of the bird's name. What I remember clearly (and this might be nice to point out) is that - as she didn't remember the name either - María Luisa would herself

Whilst Bemberg's sensual and funny films were popular with the Argentine public, and became increasingly so with critics at home and abroad, the initial critical culture into which, in the early 1980s, they intervened, was both that of the left-wing heir of Third Cinema debates (despite the fact that most 'left-wing' critics had been silenced) and of a press under a dictatorship.⁵⁴ Thus first-wave domestic reviews show at best, reluctance and at worst, hostility. It was not only for her feminist subject matter, but because she was rich, and a woman, that Bemberg 'had a very hard time in Argentina.'⁵⁵ This critical attitude remained potent up to the time of her last film and fame and affected even some of those who worked with her. According to Mercedes García Guevara, those new on her crew for De eso no se habla thought that she was just a rich, bored housewife. They soon changed their minds.⁵⁶

This section considers the popular before the critical response. It evaluates the box office figures before sampling contemporary reviews from the larger sample in the archives cited in Appendices Two to Five. The selection is made from what research of all home reviews suggests is representative. The domestic, is then compared to the international, critical response, especially that of the USA and Europe.

The box office figures indicate the outstanding domestic popularity of Bemberg's films:

make the sound to the sound director many times. The sound guys finally found it and ML was very happy to have her bird in the film' (from e.mail to the author, 20 May 2002).

⁵⁴ If Barbara Quart (1989, 242) is correct that even to women directors from the 'third world ... often other social problems in these cultures seem more pressing than those of women,' it follows that Bemberg's feminism would be particularly open to hostility amongst left-wing critics.

Fig.1.1: *INCAA League Tables, 1981-1993* ⁵⁷

Year	Film	Position in Top Ten	Spectators	Top Film
1981	<u>Momentos</u>	9	285,201	<u>Los Parchís contra el inventor invisible</u> (865,576)
1982	<u>Señora de Nadie</u>	5	383,800	<u>Los fierecillos indomables</u> (1,333,659)
1983				<u>Los extraterrestres</u> (1,125,891)
1984	<u>Camila</u>	1	2,117,706	(2 nd : 1,168,031)
1985				<u>La historia oficial</u> (899,940)
1990	<u>Yo, la peor de todas</u>	3	109,000	<u>Exterminator</u> (2) (373,000)
1993	<u>De eso no se habla</u>	4	176,749	<u>Tango feroz</u> (1,469,277)

Perhaps most notable of all is that - in a culture where during the Dirty War (up to 1981), box office sales decreased by fifty per cent in the provinces and by over thirty per cent in Buenos Aires (Torrents 1987, 103) - Bemberg's first film, Momentos, made it into the top ten (and broke even). Camila stands out for being top box office scorer for 1984 and actually for out-grossing all Argentine films (until 1999). It also attracted double the number of spectators to the following year's top film (which won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film). Also of interest is the popular success of a 'difficult' film, Yo, la peor de todas.

⁵⁵ Clara Fontana (Buenos Aires, 4 September 2000).

⁵⁶ Mercedes García Guevara (Buenos Aires, 31 August 2000).

Details of where the films were premiered confirm Bemberg's increasing popularity and attractiveness to exhibitors:

Fig.1.2: Bemberg's Film Premiers⁵⁸

Momentos
Cine Broadway, 7/5/81, PM (Prohibited to those younger than)18 ⁵⁹
Señora de Nadie
Ambassador, Atlas Recoleta y Callao, 1/4/82, PM 18
Miss Mary
Atlas, Lavallo, y Atlas Santa Fe, 31/07/86, SAM 16

Nevertheless, the relative high-scoring positions of Bemberg's films are more accurately evaluated by a comparison of Argentine to foreign films on the Argentine market, and also by a comparison of numbers of spectators, in those years:

⁵⁷ The National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts. All tickets for all films are numbered every year and sent here. Note that the years 1983 and 1985 are included so that the extent of Camila's success can be evaluated.

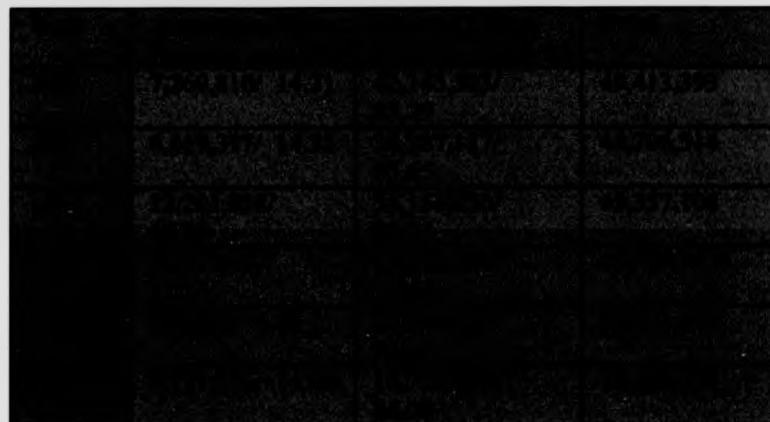
⁵⁸ Information accessed from the library of the Manuel Antón Universidad del Cine.

⁵⁹ The classification of Bemberg's films marks a new permissiveness after the military regime had collapsed. This permissiveness is the more marked in that with time - at least with Camila and Miss Mary - the films get more sexually explicit. The semantics of classification pre-, and post-, democracy is also revealing. PM - a pre-democratic acronym - abbreviates 'Prohibidos menores de/prohibited to those younger than...', thereby highlighting and enacting a prohibition.

Fig.1.3: Number of Films on the Argentine Market, 1981-1993 ⁶⁰

Year	Argentine Films	Foreign Films	Total
1981	26	317	343
1982	17	237	254
1984	24	270	294
1986	35	359	394
1990	12	216	231
1993	13	182	193

Fig.1.4: Number of Spectators to Argentine and Foreign Films, 1981-1993 ⁶¹



Such comparisons show that Momentos came ninth out of a total of 343 films, and that Camila's two million viewers represented one sixth of all viewers of Argentine films in that year. This seems extraordinary in the light of Annette Kuhn's (1982, 139) readings of New Hollywood Cinema. She says that for

SAM - a democratic acronym - abbreviates 'Sólo Apto Mayores de/appropriate only to those older than...', thereby suggesting a permission.

⁶⁰ I get this information from Octavio Getino (1998, 337) who cites as his sources, INC (The National Institute of Cinematography), INCAA (The National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts), the review Heraldo de Cine and the Journal SICA (The 40th Anniversary edition).

films like Girlfriends (Claudia Weill, USA, 1977) and Julia (Fred Zinneman, USA, 1977) feminist readings were not required, 'since it would be problematic for cinematic institutions whose products are directed at a politically heterogeneous audience overtly to take up positions which might alienate sections of that audience.' Nevertheless, the only film by the feminist Bemberg for which there are no figures, because it was not in the top ten grossing films, is Miss Mary (reasons for which strange occurrence, given that Miss Mary is the most well known of Bemberg's films beyond Argentina, are made clearer by the evaluation below of the contemporary cultural climate).⁶²

There is no absolute way of gauging affect upon an Argentine audience. INCAA's statistics, for example, are not gendered. Nevertheless, her collaborators were sure that Bemberg was always popular with an audience of (predominantly) older women. (Lita Stantic said that the first two films profoundly alienated men.) Camila was exceptional in also exciting the very young. Jorge Goldenberg suggested that it was especially popular with the young, because it is a love story and romantic. (Today there are many nineteen-year old Argentine women called Camila.) The young cannot account for the two million home viewers, however. The experience of the military dictatorship (and the film's strong denunciations against it) accounted, as intimated above and as borne out in the analysis of reviews below, for that.

⁶¹ I get this information from Octavio Getino (1998, 199) who cites as his sources, INC (The National Institute of Cinematography), INCAA (The National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts), the journal Deisica and the review Argentina Audiovisual.

⁶² Whilst this evaluation will suggest that sections of the audience were alienated by the class, rather than by the feminism, of Bemberg's films, it is also true that Miss Mary had great

Despite Bemberg's popularity, home reviews give reluctant praise. My findings from the Argentine Cinemateca reveal that the number of home reviews increases exponentially with each successive film.⁶³ In 1981 Momentos received the attention of only six papers (and reviewers). Twelve years later, this number had increased by 450 per cent. De eso no se habla received twenty-seven reviews. This is unsurprising, but demonstrates that Bemberg's popular success meant that reviewers were increasingly required to take her seriously. That they felt constrained is indicated by the fact that whilst their later reviews admitted that she was very good, they are written without enthusiasm. Close analysis reveals ambivalence.

Many of the reviews of the first two films take the form of interviews and range from faint praise to denigration. Daniel López (Convicción, 8 May 1981) recognizes in Bemberg a potential great director but accuses Momentos of coldness, and the director herself of replaying her 'obsessive' theme of adultery. Convicción later headlines (20 May 1981) Giselle Cásaes' review of Momentos with 'Lamentable Focus of Certain Feminist Attitudes'. Two reviews of Señora de Nadie especially demonstrate that a misogynistic attitude was augmented by class prejudice against Bemberg. There is no need to read beyond La Nueva Provincia's headline (Bahía Blanca, 2 May 1982), 'Story of an Obsession', to get a feel for the hostility to which an aristocratic feminist filmmaker opened

competition at home, the entire Argentine cinema industry having had 'an exceptional year in 1986' (Torrents 1987, 110).

⁶³ The Cinemateca has a collection on microfilm of all (Buenos Aires) newspaper reviews of, and articles on, all the films; for: Momentos: 6; Señora de Nadie: 7; Camila: 10; Miss Mary: 13; Yo, la peor de todas: 23; De eso no se habla: 27.

herself up in 1980s' Argentina.⁶⁴ 'Feminism is the illness of the rich' serves as caption to a photograph of Bemberg directing. The reviewer and interviewer, Albert Down, liked Momentos, but displays a failure of attention to Señora de Nadie when he says that he had not wanted to see the same film again.⁶⁵ Down has however understood that both films are critical of men when he asks if Argentina is a macho country. When Bemberg replies, 'Certainly,' his questions and responses become increasingly offensive. He accuses her of pedantry when she objects to the generic hombre/man that it fails to include women. He repeatedly calls her Señora, to which she requests, 'María Luisa, please.' This becomes a printed joke - used to refrain (and end) the interview. Bemberg's increasing (although courteous) irritation then becomes subject for further amusement. Over the second and last page of the copy of the interview in The Miguens Archive somebody (Bemberg probably) has scribbled 'HIJO DE PUTA/Son of a bitch.'

Nevertheless, it was not just the male response that was hostile to Bemberg's class and feminism. Tiempo de Córdoba (20 June 1982) prints a round-table debate between eminent women. It demonstrates that cultural conditioning against which Bemberg's films pit themselves. In their strong objections to the female protagonist becoming the wife-of-nobody and leaving her children, these women restrict their comments to plot outlines and reveal an insensitivity to the mother's pain which (as Chapter Two will demonstrate) is part of the film's project. Barrera, who describes herself as 'a happy housewife,' says, 'It's just

⁶⁴ 'Crónica de una obsesión.' These words play on the title of Bemberg's filmscript for Crónica de una Señora/Woman's Story (Raúl de la Torre, Argentina, 1970).

⁶⁵ In Momentos the female protagonist has an extra-marital affair, but in Señora de Nadie the wife leaves her flagrantly unfaithful husband to achieve an independence of all men.

not credible that a woman who until this moment has been a good mother, good wife, can forget everything and leave it.' To which Malem, a lawyer, says, 'But she's not a real mother. She neither washes nor looks after them. Others do it for her. So it was easy for her to leave them.' She concludes, 'I don't think she represents the Argentine woman,' thereby demonstrating that in creating a wife-of-nobody, Bemberg created a female protagonist indeed transgressive of Argentina's cultural expectations.⁶⁶

That Bemberg's films were more favourably received by the critics outside Argentina says much about cultural conditioning and prejudice at home. Graciela Safrán says that a film about a woman made by a woman has enriched the world but limited its perspective.⁶⁷ Likewise, César Magrini (*El Cronista Comercial*, 2 April 1982) says in his headline that *Señora de Nadie* has 'More Style Than Depth.' In such a critical climate it is unsurprising that any praise of an aristocratic woman filmmaker is grudging, nor that *Miss Mary*. Bemberg's only film to present her class, was the only film that was not a popular success. Sometimes class and gender, extend to racial, prejudice. *Convicción* (8 May 1981) feels free to print that in *Momentos* the actors are struggling to work against the 'Teutonic blood of María Luisa Bemberg which is clearly inhibiting them from stronger expression.'

Camila, however, shocked the critics out of their complacencies. Now we see an intellectual evaluation of Bemberg's practice, with the result that Ricardo Sanguino (*Revista de Colores*, July 1984) says, 'there will truly be a before and

⁶⁶ Nevertheless, such expectations, it must be remembered, are expressed in reviews still coming out of a military dictatorship (albeit a dictatorship losing its power).

after Camila in the history of Argentine cinema.' Carmen J. Rivarola (La Prensa, 18 May 1984) notes two essential merits of Camila: the 'wonderful (historical) reconstruction' and an 'intense emotiveness' expressed through the protagonist. Nevertheless, the shock of Bemberg's success was not everywhere well received. It was the priests whose voices were most vocal in the press against Camila. Interviewing Friar Diego Valdecanios (Revista de Colores, July 1984), Ricardo Sanguino touches on the parallels between the years preceeding Camila's release and the time of the Rosas' dictatorship which is its context. The priest responds, '1848 is not the same as 1976 ... In the year 1848 there was prosperity and peace ... the film is bare-faced in its feminism, and this is not strange when you look at the career of María Luisa Bemberg.' The priest is hoisted with his own petard when he says, 'We all know that we are one in the family of the Catholic Church and we should not for one black sheep break the knot that ties us. The knot is Christ.' In the black sheep is a clear (if unconscious) reference (as well as to Camila's defrocked priest) to Bemberg, whom he scapegoats rather than acknowledge institutional guilt. The response of the Church reveals its still powerful presence in Argentina in 1984 and its tacit acknowledgement that Camila's vitiations of it and its powers were a successful affront. (The Church's response also importantly indicates that we cannot ascribe otherwise favourable reviews to the fact alone that by the time of Camila's release Argentina was enjoying a 'democratic' uncensored press.) Nevertheless, it remains not only priests or men who object to Camila's attack on the Church. Silvia Cecilia Enríquez (La Gaceta, Tucumán, 4 July 1984) says that 'Nothing good can come of representing a woman who seduces a man away

⁶⁷ In an un-referenced article in The Miguens Archive.

from his vocation.' Such opinions demonstrate the continuing constriction of women's thinking, the horizons of which Bemberg was trying to open up.

Thus it was too much to hope that Camila, released in 1984 into a newly-democratic Argentina, popular as it was, would be free of earlier critical prejudices. That reviewers now had no choice to take this film seriously, does not mean that they felt the need to take its director seriously. In Satiricón (July 1984), Bemberg is still impeded from discussion of her films by questions like: 'It's true isn't it that feminist groups are made up with lesbians and spectacularly ugly women?' She is angry: 'For heaven's sake, this is what macho men say. I respect lesbian women ... but to imply that they become feminists to pick up lovers is a coarse stupidity.' Nevertheless, such discussions at-all indicate the new more open political climate inaugurated by the lifting of censorship in newspapers.

Camila's success inaugurates wider press coverage of Bemberg's subsequent films whose pre-production phases now receive publicity. The director herself continues partially eclipsed. In the case of Miss Mary it is the presence of Julie Christie in Buenos Aires that stirs most press response, both in the shooting and post-release stages. Nevertheless, there is more respect for Bemberg's finished products. Jorge Abel Martín (Tiempo Argentino, 2 August 1986) is full of praise: 'Here is Miss Mary who establishes (Bemberg) as one of the most formidable directors in Argentine cinema.' Usually, however, praise is grudging. Whilst Daniel López (La Razón, 1 August 1986) praises Miss Mary's style, he complains that the argument is insubstantial. He singles out the cameo

acting of Luisina Brando who in her brief appearances still manages to bring 'a welcome enlargement.' In most of the reviews, the sexism is barely disguised. Clarín Espectáculos (1 August 1986) stints its praise by referring to Bemberg as Miss Mary's 'talented (woman) director.'

Reviews continue to be stinting for Yo, la peor de todas and Bemberg's patience continues to be tried. Bemberg's interviewer in Tucumán's La Gaceta (15 May 1988) asks her why her protagonists are always women and why her films' themes always revolve around them. Her exasperation at this line of questioning is clear. She responds with her own question, 'Would you ask the same thing of a male director?' Nan Giménez' review (Ámbito Financiero, 19 August 1990, 17) has as its caption: 'The beauty of the images is the film's major achievement.' Nevertheless, as with Miss Mary, it is by her choice of stars (this time of Assumpta Serna) that other elements of Bemberg's direction are shadowed. Serna's beauty and notoriety as Pedro Almodóvar's heroine in Matador (Spain, 1986) is made much of in many papers. La Nueva Provincia (Bahía Blanca, 10 September 1990) quotes Bemberg's reasoning: She chose Serna for mental energy and 'moreover because she is beautiful and I think that beauty is moving.' Nevertheless, the review fails to explore the film's political equations of beauty and truth. (Chapter Three's examinations of Bemberg's representations of history and 'truth' aim to redress this neglect.)

Only with De eso no se habla is there general acknowledgment that Bemberg's fictions have wide historical import. The interviewer in La Razón (17 May 1995) questions Bemberg's use of political euphemism. Bemberg (like her

collaborators) is disingenuous in answer: 'In Argentina, there has been much censorship, self-censorship and many euphemisms have been used to hide the truth, so that, of course, it is possible to make a political reading of the film.' (Chapter Four's analyses of De eso no se habla will counter Bemberg's evasions by suggesting that euphemism is a vital part of her wider than feminist political project.) Perhaps this film is accorded respect (and apart from the fact that by the 1990s times have moved on) because, despite its tragic import, it is a comedy in which the feminism is more subtle than didactic. Perhaps Bemberg's declaration: 'My debt to feminism is now paid ... now I want to amuse myself, make a thriller or a comedy' (Revista Semanario, 25 May 1993), disposed reviewers to receive the film favourably. Alfredo Serra (Revista Somos, 31 May 1993) welcomes such 'change of direction' in the 'intelligent but at times cold cinema of María Luisa Bemberg.' Nevertheless, it is not as if the misogyny and class distrust have disappeared. Despite their serious attention, reviewers are still talking about Bemberg's aristocracy, and, symptomatic of this in an international review, the way in which she sits on a sofa (Peter Brunette, New York Times, 25 September 1994).

Thus even as Bemberg's films achieve an increasing formal and thematic complexity, the generality of domestic reviews, whilst according more grudging recognition, remain shallow. They bear out the opinion of her collaborators who suggested that there are particular reasons why Bemberg (still) is not seen as one of the great filmmakers in her own country. Feminism continues to be even less popular in Argentina than in other 'developed' countries. Neither Mercedes García Guevara, film director, nor Clara Fontana, feminist film critic, could

name one feminist director among Bemberg's successors.⁶⁸ Fontana hazarded that it is because Bemberg's films were so of their time that she is not now appreciated by women filmmakers.⁶⁹ In terms of Bemberg's influence, 'The gap and the prejudice remains, for Bemberg was a feminist in a pure sense.'⁷⁰ The gap refers to the feminism, but the prejudice has complicated origins. Bemberg's aristocratic background adversely affected her critical reception, as much as did the macho expectations of the industry. Before she held a camera her place in Argentina's intellectual circles was ordained, not only as a feminist but as an aristocrat, to be one of 'exile.' Once she had picked up a camera, Bemberg's popularity offended the cultural, and leftist, élite. There was a strong sense amongst intellectuals in Argentina in the 1970s and early 1980s (notwithstanding that populism may be being rethought by the 1980s), that if you were involved in culture, you should be leftist, and if you were popular, you should be populist. Analysis of most home reviews has suggested that whilst the domestic critical culture into which Bemberg made an intervention was deeply misogynistic, her class was as fundamental to the adverse reception of her films as was her feminism. The class effects of Bemberg's films obscured

⁶⁸ To the question what direct influence Bemberg had on her and on other women film directors, Bemberg's close associate and present woman film director, Mercedes García Guevara (Buenos Aires, 31 August 2000) responded that although people see an influence in her *Río escondido/Hidden River* (1999), 'I wasn't setting out to make a feminist film. And there are no feminist filmmakers now. Perhaps María Luisa was the only one in Argentina.' Clara Fontana - critic of *Artinf* (Buenos Aires), and *Luna* (Buenos Aires), cinema, and feminist, reviews, respectively - likewise suggested (Buenos Aires, 4 September 2000) that whilst there are a few feminists working on shorts and documentaries, 'There are no feminist feature film directors in Argentina today.' (Clara Fontana was in the original feminist group with Bemberg.)

⁶⁹ All of Bemberg's collaborators suggest that in their feminism her films were of their time. Both Lita Stantic (Buenos Aires, 24 August 2000) and Jorge Goldenberg (Buenos Aires, 28 August 2000) suggest that whilst the first two films are 'didactic,' they are 'the most feminist.' *Momentos*, especially, was revolutionary. (That all it does is chart an affair from a woman's point of view measures how things have now changed for women.) Bemberg's feminism may provide a clue as to why she is not followed in Argentina today. Nevertheless, I suggest that both the common perception and that of her collaborators is too simplistic. Chapter Seven will suggest that Bemberg's later films anticipate a post-feminism that is ahead of its time.

⁷⁰ Clara Fontana (Buenos Aires, 4 September 2000).

examination of her feminist revolution of cinematic language and the feminist political project of Bemberg's films was at best overlooked, and at worst, disparaged.

Vitaly, therefore, the denigration of Bemberg's talent was fed by class as well as by gender prejudice. Class prejudice was so powerful that (arguably) the aristocratic subject of the best-known film outside Argentina, Miss Mary, affected even the popular response, so that exceptionally it was not a domestic success. Nevertheless, Bemberg's languorous film style and presentation of bourgeois heroines did not help matters and made her appear reactionary in the 1980s. In this respect (alone) her first films were close to those of the 1960s' Argentine New Wave. Her later recourse to surreal themes places her well within this earlier Argentine context too. It was easy therefore for those many intellectuals who expressed the sense that 'the Pentagon was paying for the films' to dismiss Bemberg.⁷¹

More disinterestedly, some critics believe that Bemberg's class limited her feminism, and this may have pre-empted their praise. (Exemplary of this implication is a review of Miss Mary by Pam Cook cited below.) Her collaborators, however (significantly Goldenberg and Stantic who are notably of the left), respect Bemberg's cleverness in restricting herself to what she knew. Moreover, Goldenberg and García Guevara suggested that her class is as important in the films as is her feminism. My thesis has one answer to this. Bemberg's achievement must be measured by her challenge to feminist

⁷¹ Ibid.

filmmaking. Although Bemberg's class would be an important area for research it is only the subject of the present thesis in so far as it inflects her feminist subject matter and composition.⁷² For example, Chapter Seven will propose that Bemberg uses women's fashion and its class associations, as a way of countering the censorship of women in Argentina. In so doing, the chapter sees how she hyper-feminises and makes a spectacle of her beautiful women in a way that is transgressive not only of male-dominated, but of feminist, filmmaking codes.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Bemberg irritated the left-wing cultural élite by proposing that feminism is political and at the same time made their disparagement easier by making her statements via beautiful heroines in glossy films. The films - opulent and employing consummate stars - speak a vocabulary diametrically counter to that called for by (an albeit earlier and fading) Third Cinema. How then is Bemberg's film language 'subversive'? We must look to Bemberg's construction of the look in its active sense. The final chapters of this thesis will suggest that Bemberg's construction of the gaze is indeed contestatory of dominant film language. They will also propose that Bemberg's spectacular display of her women is part of her (unusual) feminist project. Whilst it was hard for Bemberg that even this much was not generally acknowledged in her lifetime, all interviewees assented to this proposal. Mercedes García Guevara suggested that 'making a spectacle' of women would

⁷² Certainly all of Bemberg's compositions show easy knowledge of, and access to, the world of the 'Masters' that only her class could have given her, and her (early) feminist protagonists are upper middle class. Nevertheless, with the exception of Miss Mary, Bemberg does not analyse her protagonists' class.

be peculiar to Bemberg because 'The celebration of beauty was so vital to her.'⁷³

With the public, however, Bemberg's films were always popular. With this public she moved herself (from exiles multiplied) into the centre. That she did this at a time of military dictatorship when all repressions were brutally augmented is achievement indeed.

B. Outside Argentina

Bemberg could expect the critical response beyond the boundaries of Argentina to be subject to more straightforward prejudices. Reviews in the USA and Europe begin after the international success of Camila in 1984. Alberto Tabbia (Variety International Film Guide 1987) says of Miss Mary, that it 'is a film as delicate and finely-crafted as its subject matter is fragile.' Outstanding, however, is the critical success of Yo, la peor de todas in Venice. The film could not compete in the 47th Venice Film Festival (1990) because Bemberg was on its jury. Nevertheless, it was awarded the 'Elvira Notari' Prize beyond the competition. Alberto Lattuada, member of the Venice jury, sent Bemberg a fax from the Hotel Excelsior Venezia Lido saying, 'Your picture, it's a masterpiece, but I cannot go on writing because I'm still moved.'⁷⁴

Some male critics, however, seem unable to help their misogyny. When in Variety International Film Guide 1991's special tribute to Bemberg, Tabbia retrospectively assesses Momentos as a 'timid debut,' he fails to situate Bemberg's films within their repressive Argentine context.⁷⁵ Furthermore, he (fearfully) describes Bemberg as someone who was first involved in 'feminist

⁷³ Mercedes García Guevara (Buenos Aires, 31 August 2000).

⁷⁴ See Appendix Five, Fig.A5.13.

militancy.' Although he likes Yo, la peor de todas (he calls it a 'very original, occasionally disturbing, intensely personal work'), to make it was (suggesting an element of hysteria in her) Bemberg's 'most cherished obsession.' He says of Camila (in perfect understatement) that it 'impressed young moviegoers.' Otherwise the only explicit criticism of Camila comes from Richard Corliss' discussion of the selection process for the Oscars' Best Foreign Film category in 'Handicapping the Foreign Oscar' (Time, Amsterdam, 25 March 1985). In his recourse to soft porn vocabulary Corliss reveals - rather than a critical appreciation of Bemberg's aesthetic choices - his approach to film with sexual content: 'Even as Camila is attracted to the delicious danger of causing scandal, Bemberg revels in the prerequisites of kitsch: a little erotic incandescence here, a bit of soft-focus dappling there ...' This comment (typical of the content and tone of the whole article) demonstrates how sexism has precluded a cinematic appreciation of how 'erotic incandescence' might be appropriate to Bemberg's feminist intent. Corliss' chauvinism is not restricted to the sexist kind, however. The article suggests that because the selection of 'third-world' films may be tokenistic, 'third-world' films do not stand up to criticism.

Sometimes other more favourably-disposed critics miss the point. Pam Cook (Monthly Film Bulletin, October 1987, 291-292) neglects to consider Miss Marv's implicit criticism of its protagonist when her only objection against 'this poignant and lyrical film' is its insistence 'on the inevitability of repression.' For Yo, la peor de todas some critics were not so inhibited from speech. Barbara Shulgasser (San Francisco Examiner, 12 January 1990) has praise for

⁷⁵ Although Tabbia is from Argentina, he is writing here for the international press.

Assumpta Serna, 'but the movie, at nearly two hours, seems never-ending,' and has 'an unfortunate, slow-witted feeling.' Finally, there continue to be similar misunderstandings of the spirit and political complexity of De eso no se habla. The reviews (both in Britain and in the States) are mixed, and indicative of the film's strangeness. Whilst in Britain Derek Malcolm headlined his film page in The Guardian (4 August 1994), 'Well Worth Talking About' and reviews De eso no se habla first, Lizzie Francke (Sight and Sound, 1994, 9, 39) is more ambivalent. She responds to its spirit as an uneasy fairy tale and singles out Luisina Brando for praise, but stops short of recommendation. Nevertheless, Malcolm is sure it is Bemberg's best film, and through it compares her to Fellini and Buñuel. He concludes, 'This is a highly original film and one of the very few around at the moment worth talking about.'

So worth talking about that De eso no se habla was eulogized in the States. There is fitting irony that Time's praise comes from the same Richard Corliss who disparaged Camila. He talks of 'the superb cast' and assures the reader that 'the film's images seize the memory,' and that s/he won't forget 'the face of a girl who wonders if she is the pawn of a lady's possessiveness or the beneficiary of a gentleman's lust' (Amsterdam, 10 October 1994). At the same time, the film's favourable reception was similarly marred here by misunderstandings of its project. Hal Hinson (Washington Post, 21 October 1994) believes that the film 'is too timid for its own good. The idea as Bemberg presents it seems thin.' When he argues that the passion between Charlotte and d'Andrea is not believable, he betrays a misunderstanding of this love story's point, and towards which Chapter Four will base its discussions: that the film narrates a love story

in which Charlotte's desires have not been consulted. Even its star Marcello Mastroianni originally misunderstood this. In Bemberg's personal effects is a letter (17 March 1993) from Aura Film, the projected Italian co-production company, which states Mastroianni's objections to a script in which Charlotte does not express her love for his character. In the margin Bemberg has scribbled, 'no lo ama/she doesn't love him.'⁷⁶

Thus even in the West, where reviews are generally more favourable than they are in Argentina, there continues some sexism and some critical obliviousness to the increasing formal and thematic complexities of Bemberg's filmmaking. It was not in the West however that Bemberg gauged her importance. All of my interviewees talked much of Bemberg's sorrow at the domestic critical prejudice against her. In the early part of 1995 Bemberg was dying. If De eso no se habla was eulogized in the USA (Sony Classics bought it), despite (and because of) its popularity with the public, it never was accorded the intellectual recognition where she most wanted it - in Argentina. Nevertheless, if Bemberg died outcast from domestic critical recognition, reviews and statistics indicate three points: that people in Argentina went to her movies, that she was patronized and misunderstood by reviewers at home and that she had art-house success in Europe and in the USA. That her movies had international distribution, especially in the English language market, was unusual for a Latin American filmmaker, but previously unheard of for a woman.

⁷⁶ See Appendix Five, Fig.A5.19.

C. Scholarly 'Reclaiming'

Bemberg also died too soon to enjoy the full feminist film reclaiming of her work, even though she saw her international distribution early facilitated by feminist film curators, such as Sheila Whitaker at the Tyneside Cinema in Britain.⁷⁷ In *The Garden of Forking Paths* (commemorating the 1987 Argentine Season at the National Film Theatre) is a long interview with Bemberg by Sheila Whitaker and an appreciation of her work by Nissa Torrents.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, we may say that the feminist reclaiming was belated because initial studies placed Bemberg in a wider field of Argentine and Latin American film studies that relegated her to the margins. This field continues to neglect Bemberg. As this thesis' introduction has stated, the more general surveys of Latin American film concentrate on male directors. Examples of those that merely glance at Bemberg are Jorge Miguel Couselo's *Historia del cine argentino* (1984) and David Foster's *Contemporary Argentine Cinema* (1992). The little attention that (in its 'socialist' project) Tim Barnard's *Argentine Cinema* (1986) gives Bemberg is really critical of her, ignoring the fact that she addresses the important 'social' issue of women. This is despite the assertion by John King (1990, 96) that in Argentina, 'Bemberg, Puenzo and Solanas were the most visible directors of (the early to mid 1980s).'

In this field Bemberg gets better attention in those few books either on Latin American film that devote themselves to women filmmakers, or in those on international women directors generally. Whilst it would be hard for the former to ignore her achievement, she gets scant attention in the latter. The former,

⁷⁷ Whitaker succeeded against the odds in screening *Señora de Nadie* shortly after its release in 1982 while Argentina and Britain were at war.

such as Trelles Plazaola's (1991) Women and Film in Latin America, which, in one chapter, appraises Bemberg's contributions through interview and overview of her themes and narratives, evade the question of her textual innovations. Notable amongst the latter is Ruby Rich's assessment of Bemberg in 'An/other View of New Latin American Cinema', in a volume (Feminisms in the Cinema, 1995, edited by Pietropaolo and Testaferri) that is dedicated to international women's filmmaking. Here Rich is praising (in 1989) a new aesthetic in Latin American films as their way forward from the Third Cinema of the 'New' Latin America of the 1960s. The individual's open participation in democracy now needs a new kind of film, she says. She suggests that Camila and Miss Mary - in representing the move generally in popular Latin American cinema from the epic to the chronicle - privilege subjectivity and individualism. Whilst Rich's article appears in a book on women's filmmaking, it analyses Bemberg's contribution alongside those of two other (male) directors from Mexico and Brazil.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, her analysis is pertinent to this thesis' attempt to examine the wider 'political (questions) in the personal' that Bemberg's films - particularly her heroines - are addressing.

It is also true that Rich's analysis is part of a trend in later generations of film scholars and reviewers who appraise (rather than dismiss) Bemberg as a woman director. This has been the direct result of the rise of feminist studies, particularly feminist film studies, in both the USA and in Britain. Thus there is now what we may call 'Bemberg Studies,' as indicated by the Vázquez (1999) bibliography (compiled by a North American scholar). This thesis' introduction

⁷⁹ This season was jointly curated by John King and Nissa Torrents.

has made reference to the substance of this bibliography. Vázquez furthermore lists Bemberg's prizes. These (again symptomatically) are mostly American and European.⁸⁰ Julianne Burton-Carvajal of UCSC (University of California, Santa Cruz) has edited in the form of one article (in Jaffe and Robin 1991, 331-352) many Bemberg interviews as 'Maria Luisa Bemberg's Miss Marv: Fragments of a Life and Career History.'⁸¹ Apart from the work of Burton-Carvajal, however, even feminist academic works devoted solely to Bemberg, serve as contributions to wider discussions, so that until December 2000 - with the publication of An Argentine Passion (King, Whitaker and Bosch) - there was no detailed and incisive study of Bemberg's entire output. Until then the 'Bibliography of Latin American Film' in The International Federation of Film Archives cited only one published booklet (Fontana's) on Bemberg and one completed doctoral thesis. The latter is a thesis by F. García Santillán and presented to the University of New Mexico in 1997. This explains the historical contexts to the narratives and to the diegeses of Camila and of Miss Marv, but does not give a textual analysis of either of these films.

Smaller studies on Bemberg appear in the form of chapters or articles in publications of a wider than just filmic (still usually Latin American) brief. The articles of Barbara Morris (1995) and of Currie Thompson (1995) provide good examples of this: Morris's brief is the feminist 'voice', not feminist film.

Although she analyses the differentiated voices of the films (Camila's romantic

⁷⁹ Rich looks at Paul Leduc's Frida (Mexico, 1985) and Sergio Toledo's Vera (Brazil, 1987) as well as at Camila and Miss Marv.

⁸⁰ See Appendix One, Bemberg's Filmography and Prizes.

⁸¹ In her Abrir puertas y ventanas: Mosaico testimonial de la vida y carrera de Maria Luisa Bemberg (1995) Burton-Carvajal has also collected and edited in the form of one unpublished

and Miss Mary's ironic and distancing), she bases her discussions in an analysis of narrative events in these films. What she says of the voice could equally be applied to narrative modes in literature. In 'The Films of Maria Luisa Bemberg and the Postmodern Aesthetic', presented to The Sixteenth Louisiana Conference on Hispanic Language and Literature (New Orleans, 1995), Thompson so sets out to prove Bemberg as one of Latin America's exponents of postmodernism that she asserts that her last film is not obviously feminist. Chapters Four and Seven will challenge this view.

Furthermore, there has been a kind of colonisation in some North American lesbian feminist criticism. It became fashionable, in the mid to late 1990s, to study Bemberg's films, especially Yo, la peor de todas, in its light, which was (I suggest) blinding. For example, Bemberg is appropriated and either accused or championed in the polemic against the 'homophobia' of Octavio Paz (on whose book the film is based). Emilie Bergmann (1998, 229) states that Yo, la peor de todas is 'shaped by a narrative of female abjection,' and that Bemberg exceeds Paz in positing 'a causal relationship between this defeat and the homoeroticism that can be read in some of Sor Juana's poems to her patronesses. Thus Bemberg's project is implicated in Paz's homophobic readings.' Chapter Three's analysis of the female protagonist will suggest these readings are founded in their lack of textual support, so disputing them. Chapter Six will suggest how they are blind to other forms of desire between women that Yo, la peor de todas may be constructing.

book many more Bemberg interviews under various categories, such as 'family', 'women', 'church' etc. See footnote 42.

These readings also make me wary (as this thesis' introduction has stated) of potential problems of discursive colonization of a Latin American filmmaker.⁸² If Momentos and Señora de Nadie were produced under restrictive censorship and when even adultery was 'disappeared' by the military state, analysis of Bemberg's films must attempt to be open - as Kaja Silverman (1988, 208) puts it - to 'whatever form of resistance they take.' Thus the next chapter will examine how the resistance of Bemberg's early protagonists is situated in Bemberg's own contexts discussed above, and how it is hence 'autobiographical.'

Conclusion

As a Latin American (as an Argentine particularly) Bemberg felt herself to be 'on edge.' As an aristocrat she was further relegated to the margins of her own country by the left-wing intellectual élite. As a woman - and more particularly a feminist woman - she was pushed right to the edge. As a woman and feminist filmmaker she was critically out in the wilderness: whilst there is a prestigious history of women artists of all kinds in Argentina, there María Luisa Bemberg stands alone as a great woman filmmaker. If with the general public her films were welcomed to the centre, Bemberg has to be reckoned with in the southern-cone countries: As a popular filmmaker she has been one of those who challenged not only (male) Argentine, but, Latin American, cinema.

The domestic critical neglect against Bemberg appears to stem from a four-fold prejudice. The critical élite tends to be suspicious of anybody aristocratic and of

⁸² On the other hand, a 'western' examination of Bemberg's feminist filmmaking is justified in that Bemberg co-convened and belonged to western-style feminist groups, and spoke of herself as a feminist filmmaker. Furthermore, Buenos Aires is unique in Latin America in that the

work not overtly left-wing. It is inhospitable to women (especially feminist women) and unsympathetic to the popular. To Clara Fontana it was surprising how so few leftists, even the women, could not (and still cannot) see how pure and political Bemberg's feminism was. The importance of this (not least as an indicator of Argentina's misogyny) cannot be overstated. Nevertheless, we will see that Bemberg's filmmaking transgresses the international as well as domestic boundaries of her formation. The following chapters will note that it is not just an Argentinian specificity that makes her stand out from her contemporary women and feminist filmmakers. Her ability to transgress feminist as well as Argentine filmmaking codes registers the originality of her filmmaking and thus 'Her death was a tragedy for Argentine cinema.'⁸³

middle and upper classes (to which Bemberg belonged, and confined her representation) are, we have seen, self-consciously 'looking to Europe.'

⁸³ Clara Fontana (Buenos Aires, 4 September 2001). Fontana maintained that Bemberg was always resisted and misunderstood by the intellectual élite in Argentina. Bemberg - for Fontana - was 'a great filmmaker and unique in Argentina.'

CHAPTER TWO

Bemberg's Autobiographical Representations in *Momentos*, *Señora de Nadie* and *Miss Mary*.

Introduction:

Bemberg's Biography and Her Three 'Autobiographical' Films

To begin the evaluation of Bemberg's 'originality' this chapter considers Bemberg's autobiographical feature films. These are the first two films, Momentos and Señora de Nadie, and the later Miss Mary. Originality begins with the self. Bemberg's first originality was to transgress into the male-dominated world of filmmaking. The protagonists of Bemberg's transgressions in her first two films - rich, sexually-alienated and creatively-frustrated women - loosely trace her biography: Momentos and Señora de Nadie deal in bourgeois wives who feel trapped, and attempt to break out of their husbands' homes, as Bemberg did. Nevertheless, like her (maintaining that when she left her husband she loved him still), these wives and films express ambivalence. Lucía returns to her husband. Leonora resists this, but has an affair with her husband nevertheless. Thus these films generally reflect Bemberg's marital situation.¹ We can also extrapolate from Bemberg's comments on her script for A Woman's Story (1970) that both Momentos and Señora de Nadie are likewise 'closely autobiographical: ... (having) to do with an upper-class upbringing and

¹ In terms of the marital script it would be possible to argue that Bemberg's first four films were autobiographical if her first two screenplays were to be included in the count.

the frustration and emptiness of a woman's life ... Believing that she can enrich her life by true love, she has an affair with someone ...' (Whitaker 1987, 116).²

Miss Mary, on the other hand, returns us to Bemberg's childhood world and is implicitly autobiographical. Bemberg has said, 'Miss Mary is without doubt my most personal film' (in Robin and Jaffe 1999, 339), and Jorge Goldenberg, the film's co-scriptwriter, says, 'Although I cannot say that these (the main characters, some anecdotes and some situations) were strictly autobiographical, they were close, even very close to her life' (in King, Whitaker and Bosch 2000, 42). In an unpublished letter to John King (11 August 1992), Bemberg recounts of Miss Mary. 'Many of the scenes ... (she lists them, such as 'Terry forced to marry,' and 'Carolina typing out the telephone directory') ... I remember from my own youth, even though they are not from my own experience.' She sums them up: 'It's all there, horrid memories of a terrible world.'³ The protagonist of Miss Mary, however, is not a child but a governess from Bemberg's childhood. Thus the film presents a more complex, indirect autobiography in that the heroine is not (as are Lucía and Leonora) a representation of Bemberg herself. Nevertheless, it remains unclear in which other character Bemberg herself is represented. The suggestion that her identity has been fragmented is one of the film's autobiographical points. Thus Miss Mary makes an important

² A woman's exploration of her marital situation is at the same time unusual. Women's autobiography usually insists on the pre-Oedipal relations between a parent (notably the father) and child. Virginia Woolf experimented in her autobiography and fiction with the problem of how to allow the mother's presence into a writing that traditionally has not permitted her a place. And in her chapter on Sara Gómez, E. Ann Kaplan (1983) talks about reasons, psychoanalytical and social, why the relationship between mothers and daughters has been neglected in film. Although we may argue therefore that Bemberg is unusual in exploring a mother/daughter relationship in De eso no se habla, we can also say that she only does this once she has - in her earlier films - exorcised her autobiographical needs.

³ I am grateful to John King for sharing this letter with me, and for his permission to quote from it.

contrast with the earlier Momentos and Señora de Nadie. Together the three films suggest a contrapuntal effect between self-representation, and a more general working out of Bemberg's ideas and emotions in a more diffuse 'lending' of oneself. Miss Mary reminds us to look for the inscription of autobiographical experience in aesthetic as much as in narrative and character representation.

Readings that women's films are autobiographical have been made before from tenuous evidence. Carrie Tarr (1999, 2) suggests that in foregrounding 'an independent woman ... as an artist caught up in triangulated relationships,' Diane Kurys' early films are thinly-disguised autobiography. And in her model for female authorship, Judith Mayne (1990, 90) draws on an assumption of literary criticism that 'there is a connection between the writer's gender, personhood and her texts.' This is in answer to psychoanalytical models of feminist film analysis, such as Laura Mulvey's seminal (1975) 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (that, in their suggestions of the unconscious, Claire Johnston's (1973) analyses of Dorothy Arzner and of Ida Lupino anticipate) which ignore questions of history, and of conscious assertion of the (feminine) self in autobiography.

1. Women's Filmmaking and Autobiography: The Remembering/Reconstruction of The Self

Whilst most of the theoretical discussions on autobiography are based in a consideration of literature, autobiography is as much a feature of women's filmmaking as it is of women's writing. Many women - such as Chantal

Akerman, Diane Kurys, Márta Mészáros and Margarethe von Trotta - begin their filmmaking careers with autobiography. This suggests their primal need for self-expression and their need to reconstruct themselves before they can negotiate the world. Thus autobiography by women is a first feminist act. There is a strong historical link between women's autobiography and feminism. Women's autobiography subscribes to a major tenet of all feminist practice and theory that has it that the personal is political and hence valid: the witnessing 'I' of subjective experience counters patriarchal models of constructing and understanding the world. Women's autobiographies challenge male master narratives.⁴ Thus in beginning with autobiography, Bemberg follows the established practice of the (post) second-wave feminism that she embraced. At the same time it is through the presence of her autobiographical work that she (as every woman) states that her feminist work is unique.

The telling of one's individual story involves reconstructions not only of the self (of private thinking and feeling), but of memory. In her discussion of the films

⁴ There is a masculine canon of autobiography that places the confessional texts of Saint Augustine (1961, originally circa AD 397) and Rousseau (1992, begun 1764) at its centre. Nevertheless, autobiography has become one of the most important sites of feminist debates because it demonstrates different ways of writing the self. Autobiography countered the 'author is dead' debate. For the disempowered - such as women - autobiography was a way of asserting the personal self, testifying to oppression and empowering the sense of belonging on the margins: 'People in a position of powerlessness - women, black people, working-class people - have more than begun to insert themselves into the culture via autobiography, via the assertion of a 'personal' voice, which speaks beyond itself' (Swindells 1995, 7). Nevertheless, Swindells touches here on one of the problems that autobiography poses for feminists: how to speak the self and at the same time be representative. This problem crystallized in the critiques of the black autobiography of Zora Neale Hurston (1984) that have suggested that its celebration of individuality is at the expense of that of the representativeness of black people. In answer to this, Diane Elam (1994, 65) says, 'The genre of women's autobiography should be understood as a strategic necessity at a particular time, rather than an end in itself.' This reading also allows for an understanding that there are multiple (female) subjectivities that are nonetheless located in particular times and places. (When read as biography the plurality of women's lives can be celebrated.) Thus it is not so much what autobiography is as what it does: it makes the self appear in a particular time and place. (One corollary to this - in Bemberg's filmmaking - is that she moves on from her autobiography, as well as, arguably, her early intense need to express her feminism.)

of Márta Mészáros, Catherine Portuges (1993, 19) argues that it is through reconstructions of memory that we can reconstitute/reconstruct our selves: Autobiography can 'situate what I am in the perspective of what I have been.' The female subjectivity that structures Bemberg's early films takes (we will see) the form of a feminine act of remembering. Thus questions of memory and the re-speaking of the self are pertinent, to the analysis both of Bemberg's autobiographical constructions in Momentos, Señora de Nadie and Miss Mary, and of her treatment of 'history' (in other words, the treatment of the contexts in which Bemberg found herself). But because 'Memory is a fragmented, scrappy, mixed-up state, overlaid by subsequent emotions - and by the emotion of recalling emotion' (Rusbridger 1994), its creative reconstruction is individual. At the same time, one's ideas and emotions, once part of a text, have been transmuted into a form of public self-representation. To communicate at all autobiography has to generalise individual experience. In her analysis of Truffaut's 'autobiographical' work, Ann Gillain (2000, 144) suggests that the distancing involved in putting one's experience onto the page or screen is that which enables a universal language. Thus memory not only transmutes the past, but situates the private thought and feeling within the realm of the public 'story.' Thereby the individual places herself in and reconstructs history. The protagonist in Señora de Nadie is firmly situated in her class, and Miss Mary itself foregrounds the situating of the governess' reminiscences: Public events of Uriburu's and Perón's military takeovers frame respectively, the beginning, and ending, of the film and punctuate the story throughout.

In this respect of memory, Ann Gillain's proposal that Truffaut's films replay a matrix (of poor parenting) is central to my exploration of Bemberg's autobiographical work. Truffaut (always attempting to come to terms with his past) replays his matrix through a 'script of delinquency' (Gillain 2000, 142). This script - underlying the surface one - need not be overt. I suggest that Momentos, Señora de Nadie and Miss Mary all have at their core a matrix. Bemberg's matrix is of sexual alienation. Thus her protagonist's transgression that involves a breaking out beyond those patriarchal boundaries that demarcate the domestic space is a sexual one. Each film replays the matrix of sexual alienation through its particular script - the way in which such alienation is remembered - which forms a dialectic with the other scripts, and suggests that no one script is conclusive. Analysis of each film will exemplify how memory structures its matrix of sexual alienation and what surface script plays its variations out. The answers will reveal complex aesthetic and structural reconstructions of an autobiographical past.

2. The Matrix of Sexual Alienation in Momentos, Señora de Nadie and Miss Mary

If we accept Bemberg's loose autobiographical identification with the protagonists in the first two films, the autobiographical script is transgressive in relation to the role of wife. Each film explores one of the two transgressive possibilities. The first, Momentos, deals in a love affair. The second is more daring. It risks the opprobrium of Bemberg's class. The wife dares to belong to no one at all. Señora de Nadie has the wife leave her husband to find autonomy by working and becoming financially independent: through its script of sexual

transgression, it contests the convention whereby women's transgression has been reduced to the sexual one. This is directly autobiographical. Bemberg broke up from her husband to make films, not to take a lover. If the sexual is symptomatic of a wider, social, alienation, Bemberg's autobiographical films stress that women are socially located. Thus the means whereby they transgress are socially determined.

Miss Mary likewise commits a sexual transgression (one that forms the core and climax of the story) and for which she is punished. The girls are trapped (locked into the bathroom) by it (so that they are not contaminated by Miss Mary who is sent packing). The parents fear a moral transgression, whilst the film presents Miss Mary's transgression as a brief moment of social rebellion against repressive, familial bonds and their particular manifestations in Catholic Argentine society.⁵ (When the father of the Bordagain family interviews the governess, her single state, financial need and Catholicism are all made points of.)⁶ Furthermore, Miss Mary's transgression is counterpointed against the liberal sexual infidelities of the father and enables the concept of adultery to be staged as sexual hypocrisy. This is significant in the most overtly autobiographical film. Sexual alienation, and as a symptom of social repression, become autobiographical tropes. (As verification of this, the next chapter will see that though their frustrations and alienations are many, none of the non-autobiographical female protagonists of Bemberg's remaining films – not

⁵ In this sense the film has a wider political project than the purely 'autobiographical': 'Miss Mary's gaze made us explore, now on the level of political interpretation, those primary images that generated the film project' (Jorge Goldenberg in King, Whitaker and Bosch 2000, 45).

⁶ Similarly, in *Señora de Nadie* when Leonora returns home to tend her sick son a crucifix is centred over the marital bed and within the frame.

Camila, nor Sor Juana, nor Doña Leonor, nor Charlotte - expresses them as sexual ones.)

All three films have an aesthetic of 'cool.' Of the first two, Catherine Grant (2000, 86-87) notes the excessive silences, the use of the long shot and take, a screen washed in pale colours, and a languorous movement, both of camera and performers. Thus the films 'self-consciously point up their weightiness and languorous feel.'⁷ The visual motifs - of autumn, winter, emptiness, thresholds (doors and windows) and confined spaces - are expressive of entrapment. Sexual transgression is then played out as an attempt to cross the delineated interior spaces of the woman, which Grant (2000, 95) suggests depict 'striking images of female stasis.' Within these confined spaces is a *mise-en-scène* of 'motifs of feminine frivolity and purposelessness' (Grant 2000, 76). Grant further posits that such 'feminine frivolity' (like sexual liaisons) functioned as an escapist fantasy in the years of dictatorship. Whilst Bemberg may be critiquing these escapist fantasies as an escape from speaking out, I will argue that she is doing more than just according judgement here: Motifs of 'feminine frivolity' express both the quality of entrapment and a tenderness toward it.⁸ Thus I argue that the images of female stasis, as well as allowing for spectator distanced contemplation (Grant 2000, 86), enable a certain degree of empathetic spectator alienation.

⁷ Perhaps what these films are also doing here is self-consciously pointing up their nature and marketability as 'art' films on a European model.

⁸ I furthermore argue (in Chapter Four) that Bemberg leaves her critique of the years of silence until her last film, *De eso no se habla*.

If there are motifs of limits here, sexual transgression is an attempt to break through them and beyond the domestic space. Momentos and Señora de Nadie make a feature of windows, but not as expressions of incarceration solely. Windows also represent the possibility of access to that only social space in which to achieve autonomy. The motif of the woman at the window is not new. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1990, 313-314) analyses what Agnès Varda does with it when Mona looks out of a window at the end of Vagabond (France, 1985). Because this event occurs in a single-shot sequence, spectator reflection is invoked. As the entire film asks us what being female is, we are now invited to question those elements of composition (such as being behind a window) which traditionally have defined the female and our looking at her. This question is made explicit when Mona opens the window to spit outside. Similarly, sexual transgression in Bemberg's films expresses both the quality of women's entrapment and their attempt to break out of it. I wish to explore these autobiographical transgressions further. I dispute Grant's implication (2000, 100-101) that in Señora de Nadie Bemberg exorcises her female protagonists' feelings of alienation.⁹ That there are unresolved ambivalences with respect to domestic space is indicated not least in the fact that Miss Mary returns to replay this space after Bemberg makes Camila (in which the eponymous heroine refuses a socially imposed sexual alienation).

The following analysis of each film will concentrate on one aesthetic feature - of sound, framing or colour - that was found to be true of all of Bemberg's

⁹ Grant (2000, 100-101) suggests that the autobiographical protagonist eventually moves beyond stasis: Señora de Nadie does not end with female entrapment, but begins with it. Just before the credits, Leonora's naked back is caught in a freeze frame - a frame that is frozen to the frozen

'autobiographical' films.¹⁰ In *Momentos* framing indicates an entrapment in which all three films deal; in *Señora de Nadie* silences compete with ambient sounds to indicate the alienation from, but longing for, home which informs all three films; and in *Miss Mary* colour brightens or fades as memory succeeds or not in containing a sexual passion with which the three autobiographical protagonists are coming to terms.

A) Señora de Nadie

As Bemberg's first project as director (but finished and released later than *Momentos*). *Señora de Nadie* is discussed first.¹¹ Here marital infidelity is told from the wife's viewpoint and the narrative follows her reactions to it. Leonora decides to leave her husband, and the rest of the film charts her struggles to set up on her own. Eventually, she sets up home with a gay man, Pablo.

Importantly, a flashback towards the end of the film reveals that this narrative has followed the memories of the protagonist. Nevertheless, for the most part the narrative is linear, beginning with the wife in her home and quickly followed by her discovery of her husband's affairs. The opening shots set the female protagonist in the space of her class and in her role of wife. She is performing domestic chores with her maid. We view her through two window grilles, one into a dining room, one into the kitchen. Just before she leaves her husband, the camera rests (in her tearful point of view) in close-up on her jigsaw, before cutting to her knitting. These images - accompanied by a woman's mournful humming (that will be refrained as a signature tune of Leonora's sad but brave

sound of an alarm clock. But the film ends - hopefully - with her laughing in bed with her gay friend, Pablo.

¹⁰ Thus each piece of textual analysis will be representative of the other two films.

subjectivity as 'nobody's wife' in the film) - are the things to which she is saying goodbye when she leaves. Here Bemberg has managed a more tempered critique of such 'frivolities' than are in *Crónica de una Señora*. Nevertheless, they mark Leonora's subsequent development. Later, in her incipient independence, she invites Pablo to her one room, 'my bedroom, my music room, my dining room.' She delightedly delineates her new space. It is more constricted, but she is happier. Leonora has escaped her former 'frivolities.' There is also the suggestion of courage in leaving comfort like this.¹²

The real courage, however, comes in leaving her children. Here the hope for Bemberg is double edged. This wife is much younger than Bemberg was when she left her husband. She presents the difficulties of a decision which Bemberg did not/could not bring herself to.¹³ This contentious decision is confronted early on in the narrative (twenty minutes into the film) in a scene in which Leonora explains to Juan and Miguel, about ten and eight years old respectively, her decision to stay away from home and to get a job.¹⁴ It takes place in a café. The public nature of such a space makes it constricting. Behind the close ups of Leonora and Juan (each of whom is framed by a window), there is constant movement of people walking to their seats and in longer-shot, cars thundering up the road. Leonora's tears speak a longing for her home, and the noises that

¹¹ Bemberg had to wait until the restraints of the military's censorship had slackened enough to allow the portrayal both of a separated wife and of the gay man who get together.

¹² Here Bemberg is doing more than filming what she knew. She stresses that because she is wealthy, Leonora (unlike many women) can leave.

¹³ In all interviews Bemberg says (without further comment) that she waited to leave her husband until her children had grown up.

¹⁴ The substance of the dialogue is that things will be the same except in the evenings. Leonora says, 'Something has happened between papa and me. Something difficult. I can't carry on living at home. I have to move house ... so that ... I'm asking your permission, my sweethearts, to leave home. I'm not well at the moment, but I don't like being like this.' She explains that

are distracting her irritate us as we strain to hear their conversation.

Notwithstanding the claustrophobia and the noise, the silences most express Leonora's unhappiness. There is no non-diegetic music (in a film in which it abounds).

The entire scene (apart from the establishing shot in which the camera moves down the perspective of café corridor before shifting slightly to the right to accommodate the view of Leonora's back and her two boys seated on a bench facing her) is staged in three-way cutting between the three actors. There are twenty shots. The cutting and length of takes is significant. Leonora dominates visually in that every second cut is back to her. Of the nineteen close-up shots, nine are of her, five of Juan, and five of Miguel. The takes of her - in a scene that is four minutes long - are longest. The boys are for the most part silent, whilst we hear Leonora's voice before we see her. She directs the conversation except at two points. The first exception comes towards the end of the scene with the interruption by Miguel who finally protests that he wants his mother to live with him.¹⁵ The second is Juan's response to this by coming to her rescue. Jorge intuitively that Miguel's objection is unfeeling.¹⁶ Juan demonstrates this both by the change of subject and by its new substance, announcing that he had other plans than to spend Saturday with her.

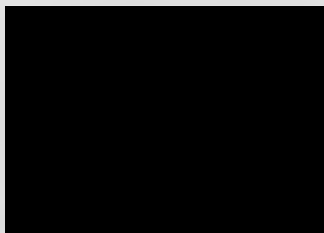
she is looking for work: 'Don't worry ... just because I'm not at home ... we'll be together every afternoon, as always. The only thing you have to do is to be grown up at nighttime.'

¹⁵ 'I don't want you to go Mummy. I want you to stay with me.'

¹⁶ Miguel is not presented unsympathetically. His reaction is natural. Nevertheless, the emotional weight of the scene is on Leonora's side.

Miguel always frames Leonora - in the bottom left hand corner of the screen, as

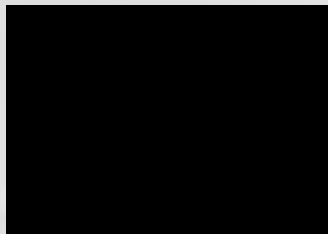
in: **Fig.2.1**



She frames in the right side of the

frame all shots of him, as in:

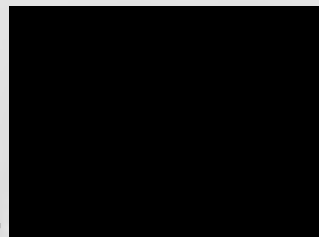
Fig.2.2



This is telling. As the youngest child he

could crystallize the sharpest criticism of her leaving home.¹⁷ Leonora has begun the conversation with an impossible request: 'I need you to be young men.' Nevertheless, the scene delineates their relationship as a way of presenting Leonora's internal conflicts. Her pain in this scene is consistent from her first close up. This is a long take as she stumbles to explain. Her honesty (and courtesy, when she asks their permission to let her go) is made painful in

her gestures and in the tight framing: **Fig.2.3**



The

long silences give weight to her gestures. Her arms move up and down in the frame, giving the sense of a wish to distract from the tears that are clear in her eyes and voice. The scene's sense of constriction, with (eventually) all three

¹⁷ Of the two children, it is only Miguel whom subsequently we see in the film - in a scene where he accords his mother 'prettiness' and youth. This scene will also show how well he has

protagonists in close-up (a powerful visual statement of their discomfort), is augmented by the sense of wider spaces in the scenes that sandwich it. In the preceding scene Leonora watches her children play happily outside in a park, so that the long shots in dappled light define the more claustrophobic atmosphere of the café. Finally, we cut from the conversation in the café to an empty window with a prospect of endless space.¹⁸

Bemberg's refusal of judgement here - a significant twist on 'The Woman's Film' - is itself transgressive. As in Letter from an Unknown Woman (Max Ophuls, USA, 1948) and Mildred Pierce (Michael Curtiz, USA, 1945), most transgressing mothers are punished (by either sacrifice or death) at the film's end. At the same time, Bemberg has presented the difficulty of this situation in concluding the scene with an impasse between mother and her youngest son. Leonora invites Miguel to the cinema.¹⁹ The long silence (first on a shot of Miguel) continues on the cut back to her searching for the help he cannot give her. The next cut - as the signature tune of 'nobody's wife' begins again - is to the empty space beginning the next sequence. Shortly after this scene in the café, Leonora (as did Bemberg herself) goes to the cinema alone. The leaving of one's children is not presented as lightly done. Nevertheless, it is an action that enables development. Thus the narrative of sexual transgression in this film is not so much structured through memory, as through a process of awakening.²⁰

coped without her.

¹⁸ This shot preludes a scene in which Leonora is seen in her job, selling apartments. We have seen that Bemberg has made a point of Leonora's wealth. She can only leave her children because she is financially able. Why does she need a job? She tells her sons she has to do it. Her need then is for self-determination - an important point.

¹⁹ Leonora says, 'And Miguel, what are we going to do ... Shall we go to the cinema?'

This sense of awakening first occurs and is vivid when Leonora discovers her husband's infidelities. Symbolically this awakening from the past occurs in an antiques shop where she confronts her husband's mistress. The latter asks of her, 'Hadn't it ever occurred to you?' and Leonora's face slowly lights up: 'What an idiot!' she accuses herself. We do not know (until a flashback near the end of the film) that Leonora has confronted her husband immediately on leaving the antiques shop. When we do see the confrontation, she has got a present in her hand. This is the present she has been holding in the shop, and it is the one that she has subsequently left on the dining room table as his birthday, and farewell, gift. The functions of this flashback are manifold. Firstly, it concretises Leonora's love - that she leaves behind. Secondly, it obviates an immediate cut (after the discovery of her husband's infidelity) to the conventional showdown. Thirdly, the flashback delays the representation of the husband until much later in the film. When Leonora meets him at the party, that we have to guess his identity is reminder that he has been made insignificant. The husband is erased at the same time that we have focused on the wife's realization of her position and her consequent decision to separate. Fourthly, we are only told towards the end of the film that the linear narrative has nevertheless been 'remembered.'²¹

²⁰ I am indebted for this idea of awakening (which I pursue) to Catherine Grant's above-cited article (2000).

²¹ The last two factors have been unsettling and have set up a mystery in the art film mould. At the same time, Bemberg has put a twist on a contemporary (mainstream) depiction of marital breakdown. *Señora de Nadie* not only delays the showdown but, preferring dumbshow, eschews dramatic devices such as the 'theme music' which 'wells up' (Geraghty 1986, 140) in that of *An Unmarried Woman* (Paul Mazursky, USA, 1978). Geraghty (1986) discusses the latter, a 'realist/narrative' film: It follows Erica around her flat, the disruption of her marriage by her husband's affair is set up at the beginning, there is a showdown between wife and husband, and the subsequent narrative is about how the wife re-establishes herself. Erica shows progression in her relationships, is a woman who learns, and there is some ambiguity concerning her future life alone at the film's end. The music and editing, however, give weight to Erica's new man, Saul, and he at the end of the film has explained to her 'What it is like to be a woman' (Geraghty 1986, 142). The answer is that woman is an 'enigma or problem' (Ibid, 145).

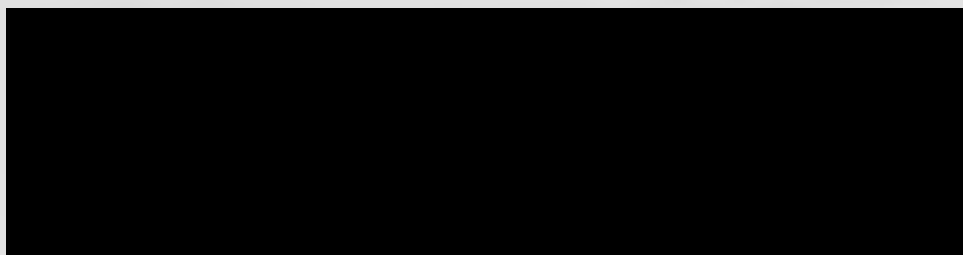
As a linear process, Leonora's awakening develops in three further scenes in which she appears progressively younger. The performance of the (young) Luisina Brando indeed involves the 'multiple physical registers' (Grant 2000, 9) of an awakening from stasis.²² Firstly, she wakes up in bed in her parents' house. The shot holds still on her face for a few seconds. She stretches herself sensuously (like a cat) whilst the camera tracks (in mid close-up) along her body to suggest her new awareness of it.²³ She looks fresher. Much later, when she revisits her home to attend to a sick Miguel, we are made to appraise her through his eyes. He looks at her photograph by the bed. The camera cuts to his point of view of her sitting on that bed. He says that she is now 'much prettier.'²⁴

In another scene (where Leonora is sharing her memories in the therapy group), memory itself is the road to awakening. We cut from the pastel lights of her parents' home, where, full of activity, Leonora has walked from right to left across the screen (Fig.2.4), to a bold image of her in close-up (Fig.2.5). But mirrored by an empty wall to her left, she takes up only the right-hand side of the frame. This, the bolder lighting and the shock cut from her bustling energy, initially suggest a powerful sense of her solitude. Nevertheless, Leonora is using memory to move from her isolation. The camera moves back to reveal (Fig.2.6) the diegetic audience of a therapy group.

²² Brando is well-, if not type-, cast here, as she uses such 'multiple physical registers' to effect in all of Bemberg's films in which she appears.

²³ Grant (2000, 98) suggests that Leonora 'discovers her body' in this scene.

²⁴ Miguel has therefore grown too.

**Fig.2.4****Fig.2.5****Fig.2.6**

She is sharing her memories with the group, so that this scene's theme is the importance of female subjectivity.²⁵ Her memories deal in women's emotional lot: 'I know many women are like me, but that doesn't help, on the contrary. I remember the case of my mother when I was a child. (Silence) Women had to suffer.' However much Leonora states that it does not help, she is suggesting that she is aware of a communal grief. Also her choice of past tense: 'Women had to suffer,' intimates (in however a fledgling way) her determination that she eventually will not. This hope of change is feminist. Furthermore, such therapy is evocative both of a moment in second-wave feminism, and of Bemberg's co-convening of consciousness-raising groups. These moments (the sharing of personal experiences) preceded all of Bemberg's activities as a filmmaker, and thus, as it was for Bemberg, it is through the support of other women (and 'marginal' people) that Leonora's awakening is made possible.

In that Leonora confines herself to the company of women is, however, a further cost. The film's narrative states that the only hope for women lies not in the renunciation of marriage only, but in that of all sexual ties. The only resolution to this can be in the non-sexual friendship of Pablo and Leonora - when they get together in bed at the film's end. Significantly, such 'recognition' is prefaced by

one last attempt (for both Pablo and Leonora) at the pursuit of sexual fulfillment. Their going out to separate venues is set up as if for one last time: 'To the kill!' says Pablo defiantly. It ends in failure for them both. The last image of their renounced party-going is the crumpled feather boa discarded at the bottom of the stairs they are ascending to bed. The camera remains poised on it in close-up for a few seconds, in reinforcement of Leonora's 'recognition' that all sex is wearisome. The matrix of sexual alienation can only be redeemed in the sexually-transgressive script (not of adultery) but of its non-sexual corollary, which is celibacy. This is a script of extreme sexual independence. The remembering of the script of sexual transgression has been structured as an awakening that is inconclusive and that has presented its celibate penalty. Nevertheless, whilst the laughter at the end of the film is poignant, any awakening at-all is frustrated in the other two 'autobiographical' films.

B) Momentos

Momentos begins with depictions of Lucía's marriage (such as eating meals in silence), that show an easy but tired relationship and in which husband and wife are rarely framed together. Although the narrative structure (motivated by Lucía's actions of submission to the young Nicolás' entreaties, her escape with him to the seaside and her eventual return to her husband) is straightforward, the many flashbacks structure these events in a complex way. Whilst the narrative opens and closes in Lucía's marital home from which all of her memories (by flashback) are seen to take place, the plot (opening beyond the marital home)

²⁵ In contrast, neither Lucía, nor Miss Mary, have anyone to confide in, and both Momentos and Miss Mary present us with a sense of our 'spectator' intrusions into their worlds of private grief.

complicates this structure.²⁶ The film opens with husband and wife sailing up river to a weekend retreat. After about ten minutes there is a brief, interruptive cut to a mid close up of Lucía pensively stirring her coffee. On the second cut to this image, a further ten minutes later, we realise (twenty minutes into the film) that the preceeding narrative has been constructed as the protagonist's flashbacks. Until we are allowed to realise that these flashbacks are following the circular progression of Lucía's memory-making, the strange montages (of Lucía stirring her coffee) have not made sense. Nevertheless, whilst memory is structuring the narrative in a circular and sterile way, the flashbacks (as those of Lucía) reinforce her viewpoint, albeit that of a weary alienation that does not take her beyond enclosed spaces and delivers her back home to her husband. Finally, all of the domestic sequences of the film are shot in pastel colours, and are predominantly silent.

The final sequence of the film narrates Lucía's return home and echoes the opening sequence which has delineated the marital space. Circularity is reinforced by the fact that the penultimate scene - beginning with a car driving from the mid distance into the centre of the frame where it stops - also echoes the second scene of the opening: a car in long-shot (driven by Nicolás) and moving towards the camera on a busy highway. At the same time, it is the differences between opening and ending that point up (more than circularity) regression. Lucía has become weary of her young lover. As she waits for him in the parked car, a train announcement calls her home. She arrives by train, on

²⁶ There are echoes here, as Catherine Grant points out, of *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, United Kingdom, 1945). *Momentos*, however, draws attention to the problematics of the memory-making process, and *Brief Encounter*, according to Robin Wood, does not. I refer to Wood's (1989) discussion of *Strangers on a Train* (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1951).

foot, and alone, not by boat and in union. She is returning not to the space of the country home but to the constriction of a city flat. Analysis will show how framing (especially) effects such constriction.

When Lucía arrives home, she enters the block of flats, ascends the lift, waits a few seconds outside the door, enters the flat's corridor and walks down it towards the living space. From her point of view we see her husband Mauricio (Héctor Bidonde), alone at dinner. He is reading a book. Lucía enters his space and seats herself at the table. She breaks a long silence by stating that she has had nothing to eat on the train and is hungry. She is shivering. He clears her a space and hands her his meal. She must help herself. She eats ravenously, and they stare at each other. He pours her a glass of wine. He closes his book, takes off his glasses in a gesture of acceptance and waits. The camera cuts to behind them and then pulls away to the closed window. Here the film ends.

The closing sequence begins with a grille (centred in the frame) and from behind which a warm yellow light emanates. The shot is held for a few seconds. Lucía is about to move behind, rather than beyond, its bars. Her reluctance is expressed through the long duration of the shots which delineate her final entry into the marital flat. The cut to the interior staircase is in darkness until gradually the screen lightens. The camera (positioned in the open stairwell) makes out a rising elevator. It follows this upwards and pans horizontally and left to that part of the corridor into which Lucía's approaching footsteps are moving. It frames (moving slowly with) her in the corridor until she comes to rest outside the front door. Finally she opens the door on which movement there

is a cut to the apartment's corridor whose only light is provided by a casement window (framed in the centre of the screen) at its end. Lucía walks towards the window (whose light increasingly she occludes) before entering the living room.

There are four shots describing the reunion of husband and wife. The first cut from the corridor is to a mid close up of Lucía leaning against a door-jamb which frames her tightly within the larger frame. The next cut (from her point of view) is to a mid-distance shot of Mauricio at dinner, which accommodates the table and the solitariness of all the implements for one. He has his back to her. As the only ambient sound has been that of Lucía's footsteps it is clear that he has heard her coming, but is choosing to ignore her. The next shot is long - two minutes and forty-eight seconds. We cut back to Lucía in the doorway. The camera moves away from her and downwards towards the table to rest upon a mid close up, in the right-hand side of the frame, of Mauricio and his solo meal. The camera remains in this position for a long time. Looking at him, Lucía moves into the left side of the frame. He is not responding. He is eating. She has to ease herself into a chair (into his space in the extreme left-hand corner of the frame) so that she is in profile to us. The camera pulls back and to the left, foregrounding her discomfort. She is squeezed into a corner still and pushed up onto the frontal plane of the frame. Such constriction is reinforced by posture. He is sitting upright. She is hunched over:

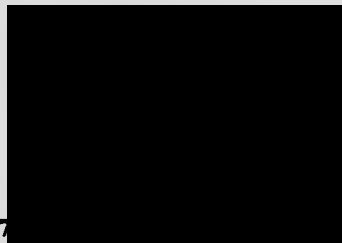


Fig.2.7 This two shot is held in silence for eight

seconds. Lucía has to break the silence. The substance of her words is loaded. For the present (tired, cold and hungry) Lucía has no choice - as Grant (2000) notes - but to return home.²⁷ After giving her the serving utensils, Mauricio waits with his hands under his chin for her to speak again. She has no more to say. They look at each other for a long time (in which the camera has not shifted position). With a final cut of 180 degrees husband and wife divide the frame, each mirroring the other at forty-five degrees. This change of angle compounds our sense of the husband's acquiescence, as well as suggests a more equitable sharing of space. From this position the camera pulls back (slowly releasing the tension), then across to the hallway window (approaching it until close-up), before pulling slowly back until fade-out.

Whilst the husband's lack of moral condemnation fits with the emotional tone of the film, this is not a happy ending for Lucía. The sense of her sadness is reinforced by the non-diegetic piano music in a minor key that begins on the cut to the last shot of the film (of the window to a beyond that Lucía refused) and continues into the credits. This music (noticeable against the audible unexpressiveness of the rest of a sequence that has featured only muted ambient sounds) refrains that of the opening credits sequence and augments the sense of non-progression. Through delayed means (this time aurally) the film's structure reveals itself to have been, right from its opening sounds, Lucía's one long melancholic flashback. (The recurring piano notes are also reminder of the lugubrious quality of Lucía's dreaming.) As opposed to the case of Miss Mary, however, we are never 'told' the point in time from which Lucía's memories are

²⁷ Such entrapment must be read against the sense of the protagonists' progressions in the other films, which (apart from in the case of *Miss Mary*) present both physical and mental journeys.

constructed. We know (from the image of her stirring her coffee) that they are made within the domestic space and can infer from Lucía's sadness (but only after the film's end), that they are occurring after she has incarcerated herself within it once more.

The image of Lucía languidly stirring her coffee is always washed in a light, yellow glow, so that the aesthetic representation of memory also suggests a lack of progression and claustrophobia. The langorous feel of Lucía's memory is aided by long, slow takes, which extend to the representation even of the film's more brightly-coloured early moments with her lover. These moments are framed by the golden glow of her reminiscence, which tempers such brightness with suggestions of nostalgia: After Lucía and Nicolás have first made love, there is a cut to a close up of Lucía (Fig.2.8), looking downwards and out of the right side of the frame.²⁸ There has been a change in the quality of the light from a blue to a pinkish-golden hue, and from a darker to a lighter tone:

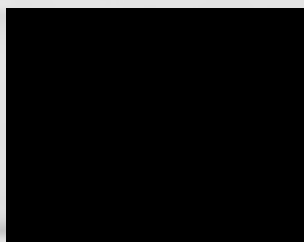


Fig.2.8

The more daylight quality of the golden light reinforces the music's suggestions that the first sexual encounter is remembered through its light as a kind of darker, melancholic dream. The camera holds Lucía's pensive gaze for a few seconds. Then she looks to her right into her next point-of-view shot: of her

²⁸ Chapter Six discusses these sequences in more detail in an analysis of Bemberg's construction of the female gaze.

husband, who is thus appraised in the light of this memory.²⁹ She is now at home and not yet happier for her experience. In the enveloping silence is a sense in which we are looking at a still photograph and a sense that the quality of Lucía's unhappiness is enigmatic. Through this autumnal 'light' of her melancholic memory are refracted all subsequent point of view memories of her adultery - as mere moments. Such interludes represent dream, rather than awakening. The script in this film suggests both aesthetically and structurally that (for women) adultery is a futile attempt at transgression. However, although adultery cannot challenge the matrix of sexual alienation, it exposes it. Adultery is not presented as an awakening, but remembered sadly from within the domestic prison. The window that at the film's opening let in the golden light (that will colour her memories like a dream) has closed once more.

C) Miss Mary

If there is a sense that Lucía cannot realize her destination beyond the window because of her social (which for women is an economic) dependency, the dreams of the governess in Miss Mary, who is similarly economically trapped, so take the character of memory's evasions that she is struggling not to wake up. Nevertheless, her memories of adulterous transgression constantly threaten to erupt. Thus the structure of her narrative is chaotic and is to be distinguished from the circular structure of Lucía's flashbacks, who hankers (at least) after the transgression of her adultery. It is also interesting that Bemberg does not place 'herself' (as the artistic but creatively-frustrated Carolina) at the centre of the narrative. Because Miss Mary is not Bemberg we are left presented with

²⁹ This cut to Lucía's appraisal of Mauricio marks how physically different he is, so that we are reminded of the more comforting similarity to her of Nicolás.

unreliable memories both of that world and of the children, including Carolina. In Miss Mary memory is so unreliable that we must unravel the film's structure. Then we see that memory's script is working to repress Miss Mary's acknowledgement of her sexual transgression with her young charge, Johnny. (This transgression of 'love' is featured towards the end of the film, and will be fully analysed in Chapter Five's discussions of narrative themes.) The sense of repression is made acute by the film's cool tone. In Miss Mary the silences are expressive, the sense of them reinforced by the long, slow takes. We note the absence of sound in those spaces (painted in cool, predominately blue, pastel shades) in which the camera lingers. It is a film in which pictures tell the story. Whilst such pictures are not confined to Miss Mary's narrative, their silent, slow and pastel aesthetic is always suggestive of her memory's denials.³⁰ These denials thus colour the entire tone, and world, of the film.

The central narrative of Miss Mary concerns itself with the eponymous heroine's time in the Bordagain family household, beginning with her arrival in 1930. The chronological order of events is her welcome to the household, scenes in which Miss Mary is teaching her young charges, a peasants' wedding ceremony 'charitably' organized by Señora Bordagain, Mecha (Nacha Guevara), Johnny's fifteenth birthday and rites of initiation with the prostitute and then with Miss Mary. Finally, Mecha dismisses Miss Mary from the house. The narrative structure is not only made complex by the deviations of Miss Mary's memory,

³⁰ A good example of this is when Ernesto, Bordagain's brother, is following the progress of the civil war in Spain, particularly the progress of Franco's fascists, whom Ernesto supports. There is a simple cut, in silence, from Miss Mary's reminiscences to a close up of a map. The shot remains still until a hand (in close-up) enters the frame and repositions a red flag. The camera moves back, firstly to reveal the map's details (these are Franco's manoeuvres we are tracing),

but involves a wider time and narrative in order to embrace events up to the time (1946) in which she remembers and when she is getting ready to leave for Britain. These wider events are told her by the adult Johnny and comprise the story of Carolina's madness (when older), Teresa's sexual initiation, and Carolina's (as well as Teresa's) objections to Teresa's shotgun wedding (to which Teresa is forced by Johnny as well as by her father).

Furthermore, Miss Mary remembers in a chaotic order. The film's narrative flashes back to arrangements for Teresa's shotgun wedding, before it flashes back to the even earlier time of Miss Mary's expulsion from the house. The plot is complicated by more than just a disjointed narrative order, however. There are three scenes/moments from which, and two people by whom, the flashbacks occur. One moment is when Miss Mary is packing her trunk for England, one is when she is in church attending her 'beloved' Teresa's wedding. The flashbacks from here are hers. The other moment occurs a few days later, when she is having tea with (the older) Johnny who is filling her in on the details of that wedding and of Carolina's madness. Here Miss Mary's flashbacks are a refraction of Johnny's. Thus the subjectivity of the female protagonist's 'present' (the film before us) is constituted by three moments in time, occurring within three spaces and is fragmented between two persons.³¹ Memory - the structuring subjectivity - is 'schizophrenic.'

secondly to reveal the hand's owner. Then there is a cut back to Miss Mary. This interjection has lasted six seconds, and has been entirely silent.

³¹ Critiques of the feminist practice of autobiography suggest that the problematic of memory lies in its attempt to reconstruct from fragments of the feminine self. To one of Bemberg's favourite authors, Virginia Woolf (1978, 142), the self is known as much through its fragmentation as its unity: 'We are sealed vessels afloat on what it is convenient to call reality; and at some moments, the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality.' Nicole Ward Jouve (1991) is one of those critics of autobiography who suggests that fragmentation is particularly expressive of the feminine condition. Although her comments are largely confined to the critic, and the

Such schizophrenia is difficult to unravel. One scene that is staged as Johnny's reminiscence is when Carolina refuses to come to Teresa's wedding.

Nevertheless, we would appear to be envisioning these memories through Miss Mary's imagination of the event. The clue to this is the cameo part played by Luisina Brando. As the flamboyantly sexual Perla, Brando makes a comment,

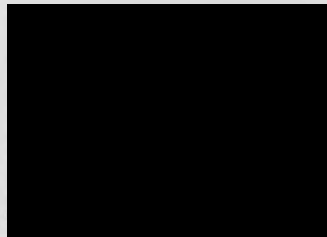


Fig.2.9 [redacted] that provokes a 'What did she say?' response on the part of the grandmother. The grandmother's response and configuration in the frame,

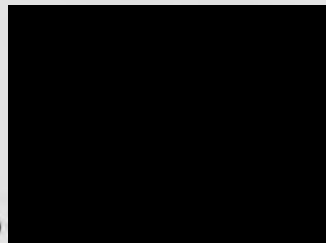


Fig.2.10 [redacted] are exactly the same as those that the audience has seen in one of Miss Mary's memories in an earlier flashback of the peasant wedding. The point of that memory, as the analysis of the female gaze in Chapter Six will make clear, is that it expresses Miss Mary's (repressed)

often-disavowed sense that criticism is autobiographical too, many of her observations bring light to bear on Bemberg's autobiographical practices. Miss Mary especially encapsulates a character whose memories show her to be in danger of disintegration. This is not always the understanding, however. Carolyn Steedman (1992) distinguishes between psychic reconstructions and historical ones. She discusses the relationship of history to autobiography and concludes (Ibid, 48) that 'The practice of historical inquiry and historical writing is a recognition of temporariness and impermanence, and in this way is a quite different (literary) form from that of autobiography, which presents momentarily a completeness, a completeness which lies in the figure of the writer or the teller, in the here and now, saying: that's how it was; or that's how I believe it to have been.' Whilst Miss Mary does not have that 'all seeing eye' or the 'certainty of memory' that Steedman (1992, 49) suggests belongs to the autobiographical

desire for Brando's own expressive sexuality. However, because these memories of Brando are exactly the same, but one is Johnny's, and the other is Miss Mary's, they make us question the images that accompany Johnny's narrative. Why should it be the expressive Brando they are remembering in exactly the same way? Is Brando here as Miss Mary visualises her, and has Miss Mary (listening to Johnny) once again written in her desire for Brando's expressed sexuality? Are we seeing Johnny's reminiscences as Miss Mary then re-imagines/constructs them?

If we are made to question whose subjectivity controls the narrative, memory's validities are made fragile. The dispersal of the autobiographical voice foregrounds the unreliability of memory that is a feature of feminist autobiographies.³² Nicole Ward Jouve (1991, 6) cites a *Las Meninas* world (Velásquez, 1656), in which the 'critic paints himself or herself into a picture full of mirrors reflecting backwards and forwards.' This conceit aptly evokes the artistic practice in *Miss Mary* of Miss Mary (but not of Bemberg who is not Miss Mary), who is shown to be constructing her own autobiography. Ward Jouve's metaphor also applies to the dispersal of the voice across characters in Bemberg's film.³³ Carolina, like Velásquez who paints himself (painting) in a

voice, her flashbacks would appear to belong to Steedman's suggestion that inner experience, as the focus of autobiography, is to be distinguished from the time-ordered causal events of history.

³² At the same time, the unreliability of memory is not solely the preserve of feminist writing. It is a feature of the post-war French and English novel, and two films directed by a man come to mind: *Hiroshima, mon amour/Hiroshima, My Love* and *L'Année dernière à Marienbad/Last Year at Marienbad* (Alain Resnais, France, 1959 and 1961, respectively).

³³ There are invitations here for further examinations of the way in which the voice is constructed in feminist autobiography. Although Annette Kuhn (1982, 131-155) is talking about documentary, her consideration of the differences between a voice-over within and without the diegetic space is apt to my discussions. In autobiographical discourses, she says, the voice-over usually occurs within the diegetic space. Kuhn (1982, 149) says that protagonists of feminist documentaries are also their own enunciating voices. In *Miss Mary*, when the protagonist is given her own voice-over, it indeed occurs within the diegetic space of the present. (That Mohamé's voice-over in *De eso no se habla* occurs without the diegetic space is appropriate to

corner of the frame, is Miss Mary's sidelined commentator. She is the one who dares make explicit the film's questions: 'Do you think our family has too much money?' 'Do you think our family is mad?' As the creative child most closely approximating to Bemberg she is the cipher of the family's frustrations, and when her creativity is quashed, bears the burden of its madness. Thus she comments on Bemberg's as well as Miss Mary's own fictions.

In her bedroom, Miss Mary constructs herself by writing home that the family welcomes her (dancing the tango with her) under the moonlight. Whilst she is shown to be lying, she is (in this instance like Bemberg herself) constructing herself from fragments of her identity. As she writes she secretly resorts to swigs of whisky. Her drinking underlines a dependency - a sense of incompleteness.³⁴ Miss Mary draws attention to its protagonist's constructions and thus to the limits of how representative the self can be. Nevertheless, Miss Mary demonstrates by her 'lying' that in order to communicate at all, her sense of her own disintegration has to be contained. Bemberg likewise contains her own dispersal across the entire world of the film by giving that world unity. The sense of her own threatened disintegration has been made graphic in the madness of Carolina. The film's unity is tenuously maintained through its coherent aesthetic tone, which in turn is counterpointed by its structural fragmentation. The sense of the struggle to maintain a fiction is immanent within the formal characteristics of the film. This fiction is working to repress

the fact that Mohamé is not telling his own, but Charlotte's, story. It is furthermore appropriate, Chapter Four will suggest, to De eso no se habla's unreal suggestions of time and space.) Finally, Nancy Miller (1991, 132) identifies the struggle for women to appropriate language at all: 'It is precisely at this place of common struggle that women's autobiography takes root.' It is significant that Bemberg's first response to the suggestion that she direct herself was that she could not do it.

mounting (potentially-disruptive) passions. Chapter Five will show how at the moment of Miss Mary's sexual transgression, this fiction and its stylistic collusions break down. Significantly, however, that scene can only be finally presented to us because Johnny has insisted that she remember their night of passion.

Altogether, the chaotic structure of Miss Mary's narrative reflects the woman's pained response to the threat that memory (re-activated in those two moments of church and tea with Johnny) poses to her sense of Catholic guilt and social position. As a social transgression such sexual transgression is indeed difficult. Casting points this up. There is always the sense that the distancing tone of the film is the governess's collusion in keeping the woman's (Julie Christie's) passion at bay. Like Lucía in Momentos, Miss Mary is economically and ideologically trapped.

Conclusion

Bemberg's autobiographical films foreground their protagonists' acts of remembering. They answer Carolyn Steedman's call to autobiography (1986, 19) to present 'a sense of people's complexity of relationship to the historical situations they inherit,' by demonstrating that autobiography is not so much about the past that it is reconstructing, as about the present and public construction of it, and they render self-conscious the fact that autobiography is a coming to terms with one's past in the present. Accordingly, Momentos, Señora de Nadie and Miss Mary work through Bemberg's feminist ideas and marital

³⁴ There is a sense in which Miss Mary feels unfinished - or at least so alone - because she does not know if her lover died or returned from the war.

life. As autobiography they adopt a complex stance. They rework a script of sexual transgression as a possible (but frustrated) attempt at escaping the sexual alienation attendant within the home. Momentos places the protagonist (right at the film's opening) on the wrong side of a window, behind it and looking out. Lucía opens the window-blind and light from the exterior floods her interior space. She looks out from the kitchen, but once she has left the frame, the camera remains on the light and on the view beyond, in intimation of Lucía's (ultimately futile) attempt to move beyond this window. In Señora de Nadie the heroine does move beyond the window (the last shots are filmed from without it), and is successfully transgressive of the marital home by staying beyond it. Symptomatically she is the only one of Bemberg's 'autobiographical' protagonists whose memory structures a linear and progressive narrative. She uses her memories to come to terms with her past and awaken from it.

Nevertheless, if Leonora has awakened to new life, she must move further forward - beyond her celibacy with which the film ends. Her transgression must be sustained by daring the full expression of her sexuality towards which imperative Bemberg's three scripts of sexual transgression are addressed. Thus Miss Mary suggests that an asexual life is interim and not the eventual answer for Bemberg. Through selection (which involves some denial) of memory, the film delays but is always leading up to the script of sexual transgression, and that of the central protagonist's failure of courage of its liberating possibilities. Hence the sense of sexual alienation is acute in this most aesthetically 'cool' of Bemberg's autobiographical films.

Sexual alienation in these films is always connected to a financial dependency. This is clear in mise-en-scènes that take pains to delineate class and social context. The opening sequence of *Señora de Nadie* describes the space of the huge flat in which the wife has to keep busy. Its subsequent script makes clear that if idleness is the plight of the middle-, to upper-, class woman then her true emancipation/transgression lies in her finding a job, not another lover. Nevertheless, because they have been made so necessary under patriarchy, women's bonds are somewhat desired. Her elegiac style demonstrates Bemberg's understanding of the losses involved, showing that her injunction is not a complacent one.³⁵ Bemberg's return to the autobiographical space (in *Miss Mary*) after the brave defiances of *Camila* suggest that women still need to move beyond both the ambivalence they feel towards the domestic space, and their tendency to repress their own desires within it, before they can achieve social autonomy (notwithstanding that *Miss Mary*'s tone of melancholy results from a socially-, as well as self-, imposed repression of the protagonist's sexuality).

The ambivalence complicating the wives' sexual transgressions is encapsulated in the ambiguity of the window as motif. Nevertheless, whilst her protagonists express ambivalence with regard to the home, Bemberg's windows do not valorise the domestic space. The autobiographical reconstruction of her (familial) past is woman's primal - not ultimate - feminist step.³⁶ Thus, although

³⁵ Catherine Portuges (1993, 20) identifies as common motifs in autobiography, a pressing and often delayed urgency to narrate a family history, a wish for reparation, and a desire to be reconciled. These are stages in mourning also.

³⁶ Whilst the fact that women are presented as disjointed, fragmented human beings could be problematic to a feminist reading, the female protagonist is only 'incomplete' in Bemberg's films where her transgression has been unsuccessful. Furthermore, even amongst Bemberg's

this chapter began where Bemberg's protagonist does (and Bemberg herself did), in the home, Bemberg's most successful heroines move beyond it and beyond the autobiographical. Chapter Three now will show how the courage of Camila and of Sor Juana is indicated as much in the (attempted) social, as in the sexual, defiances of patriarchal boundaries imposed on to contain them.

ultimately unsuccessful transgressors, there is no sense that either Camila or Sor Juana is 'unfinished' in her identity. These are not, however, autobiographical characters. Perhaps this is significant.

CHAPTER THREE

The Challenge to History (and Literature) in *Camila* and *Yo, la peor de todas*

Introduction

Having spoken through 'autobiographical' protagonists in Momentos and Señora de Nadie, Bemberg turned, in her next film, Camila, to the representation of a historical woman. Thus whilst the previous chapter examined the representation of fictional transgressive heroines in 'autobiographical' narratives, and considered the nature of their resistance, this chapter gives an account of Bemberg's representation of real historical women at the centres of Camila and Yo, la peor de todas, and asks how Bemberg makes them resist their 'histories.' In these films Bemberg combines two genres that favour sumptuous mise-en-scènes: the costume drama or 'heritage' film, and melodrama, or more particularly, 'The Woman's Film.' The textual analysis of selected scenes and their 'look' is addressed to the theoretical debates around these genres, so that we may better read Bemberg's feminist film practice in her crossing of them.

1. Camila and Yo, la peor de todas

The Argentine Camila and the Mexican Sor Juana are based on real women, whose well-documented stories are well known in their own countries. Camila - whose sub-title is Symbol of a Passionate Woman - re-tells the historically-based story of the twenty-year-old Camila O'Gorman and Catholic priest,

Ladislao Gutiérrez, their love affair and their elopement (12 December 1847). In the film, Camila (Susu Pecoraro) is the seducer of a priest. Her transgression (social as well as sexual) is to state her sexual desire. Camila's father is a supporter of the dictator Rosas and is associated with his daughter's pursuit and eventual execution by firing squad. Camila is pregnant when executed. The film opens as a sumptuous costume drama - filmed on location. The early scenes - viewed through a pink lens - wash Camila's story in red's more softened symbolisms of love. By the time of the lovers' executions, the wash of pink has become sepia, and their costumes made of sack rather than satin. Thus the colours darken as the story draws towards its bloody climax.

The protagonist of Yo, la peor de todas - Golden Age poet, Mexican nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695), thought of as the most significant woman writer in the Latin American colonial period - enacts 'one of (history's) most intense and personal confessions on the search for knowledge.'¹ The film concentrates on Juana's writing life in the convent of San Jerónimo, her eventual confession that she, 'the worst woman of all,' was unworthy and her renunciation of the intellectual transgressions involved in her poetry and ideas. The film flashes back to significant past moments in the poet's formation: her (subsequently foiled) determination to enter the university as a man, the 'trial' of her knowledge whilst a young lady-in-waiting at the court, and her friendship with Sigüenza, another (but male) poet. The film also charts her friendship with the Spanish vicereine, María Luisa Manrique de Lara y Gonzaga. Whilst, as Bergmann (1998) notes, its Baroque composition places this costume drama in

¹ Bemberg says this (in Burton-Carvajal 1997, 75-92) of Sor Juana's autobiographical Respuesta a Sor Filotea/Reply to Sister Filotea (1997, originally 1691).

the 17th century, the mise-en-scène draws attention to its artifice and constructedness. Bemberg eventually eschewed filming on location in Mexico and opted instead for studio sets designed by the Polish art director Voytek.² His sets of harsh geometric lines reinforce the nature of Juana's bold intellect (as does the angular beauty of Assumpta Serna).³ Bemberg's director of cinematography, Félix Monti, has said (in King, Whitaker and Bosch 2000, 47-48), signalling the importance of Zurbarán, that 'With Voytek, we explored hard light, and the struggle between light and shadow that one finds in metaphysical paintings.' Elsewhere Monti has said, 'We looked at Spanish painters, Murillo, and Velásquez, but especially Velásquez.'⁴ Thus Bemberg's set is deliberately painterly. What Bemberg wanted to capture from all of these models was 'a strong light of volume' that would reflect the light of Juana's mind.⁵

2. History

Although in these films Bemberg's protagonists are real historical women, this chapter's examinations are underlined by the idea that there are different truths to all stories.⁶ Nevertheless, in both films is a search for a kind of exactitude. In

² Reported reasons for Bemberg's choices here are mixed and contradictory. It is commonly thought that Bemberg declined Mexican co-production money since she did not want to make another historical costume drama, set in a Mexican convent, and starring Ofelia Medina. Graciela Galán accompanied Bemberg to Mexico for two months looking for suitable locations, however, and said that Bemberg eventually declined shooting on location only because it was too expensive. Nevertheless it is true that Bemberg was accused of 'treachery' to Mexico (for choosing the Catalan Assumpta Serna, as well as for shooting in an Argentine studio).

³ Discussion of Bemberg's choice of Serna to play Sor Juana is reserved to the analysis of Bemberg's use of stars in Chapter Six.

⁴ Félix Monti (Buenos Aires, 25 August 2000).

⁵ In full, Félix Monti (Buenos Aires, 25 August 2000) said, 'I talked much with María Luisa about this light. It had to be stronger, more stated to show Juana's strength. She wanted to create a strong light of volume.'

⁶ Bemberg was quite open about those episodes that - in order to dramatise situations - she invented for *Yo, la peor de todas*. These included the kiss between the young Juana and a courtier, and the relaxing of protocol between the vicereine and the nun in the latter's library. To enable a scene with Juana outside the convent, Bemberg also made up the scene of Juana's ill mother (in Burton-Carvajal 1997, 80).

exploring the lives of real women, they want to get to the heart of them. One point of their historical communications is that the heart matters. Thus we must ask what kinds of historical 'truth' and 'heart' Camila and Yo, la peor de todas are telling. Bemberg said, 'I wanted Sor Juana's story to be told in an atemporal and universal way in order to attack a plague that is still with us which is fundamentalism, in other words, fanaticism of all types - religious, ideological, sexist' (in Burton-Carvajal 1997, 82-84). Bemberg's statement makes clear that for her some of history's 'truths' are not only made universal and timeless by an analogy with contemporary events, but can be reconstructed as a projection towards her country's future. Certainly Camila, released in the first year of a restored democracy, could be defined (and was received) as part of the impulse towards a new national identity. In this, Bemberg is like Jean Renoir who, in La Grande illusion/The Grand Illusion (France, 1937), 'wanted to act upon history, to act for peace' (Ferro 1998, 161). This chapter will argue that Bemberg's historical films 'act (particularly) upon' the power of the Catholic Church in Argentina. Bemberg's challenge to the new future lies in her descriptions of Camila and Sor Juana as up against, and resisting the Catholic Church. Lita Stantic (Bemberg's producer) confirmed that the scene where Camila and the priest make love on the kitchen table whilst there is a Christian procession outside, was intended by Bemberg to be 'absolutely' provocative to the Catholic Church.⁷ Nevertheless, ten years after the return of democracy (31 May 1994) and ten years after she filmed Camila's execution, Bemberg was still impelled to write a letter to La Nación: Responding to Pope John Paul's claim (9 May

⁷ Lita Stantic (Buenos Aires, 24 September 2000). As testimony to the then-continuing repressive power of the Church in Argentina it is worth noting that The Life of Brian (Terry Jones, United Kingdom, 1986) and The Last Temptation of Christ (Martin Scorsese, USA, 1996) were banned on their release.

1994) that his Church's priestly ordination was reserved 'from the beginning exclusively to men,' Bemberg finishes with the challenge, 'We (women) are not yet decapitated.'⁸

3. Genre: The Historical Costume Drama

Camila and Yo, la peor de todas can be described as historical costume dramas because they film historical characters in period costume. Because their stories have been made familiar via literary texts (discussed below) they also fit definitions of 'heritage' films. Bemberg defies decapitation and 'acts upon' film history in that most historical costume dramas are about men and by men. It is important to trace the dominant debates about the historical costume drama so that we may answer how Bemberg is using it to feminist ends. Traditionally, historical costume dramas have received criticism from both historians and film critics. Historians like Pierre Sorlin (1980), Robert Rosenstone (1995) and Marc Ferro (1998) argue that any film that proposes a visual, rather than verbal, representation of history questions the status of 'straight' history as truth and thereby poses a radical threat to conventional historians. Film is thus 'unruly' in its meanings (Rosenstone 1995). In film studies two issues would appear to be at stake. The first is the status of history as truth. In contrast to those academic historians whom Rosenstone et al consider threatened by the historical film, the proposal that history's status rests on its 'truth' constitutes a major criticism for the denigrators of one type of the historical costume drama - (British) heritage films. By 'staging' the past, historical costume dramas promote the (unfortunate) idea of consensus about what that past constitutes. History at least

⁸ See Appendix Five, Fig. A5.22.

investigates what is handed down to us from the past, whereas heritage celebrates it (Dyer 2000). This is close to the second accusation of such as Craig (1991), Higson (1997) and Wollen (1991), which is that the consensual view that (British) heritage films promote is a narrow one of the past that is nostalgic for middle-class England during the crisis of the Thatcher years. Thus they conform to Marc Ferro's (1988) critique of history that it preserves only what legitimizes the power of those that govern. Distinctions, however, must be made between national heritage cinemas. Ginette Vincendeau (2001, xix) notes the debates which posit that the nostalgia of contemporary French historical cinema (in contradistinction to that of the British) can be seen as an escape from the threat of, rather than a validation of, history.

In answer to the historian's objections, feminist critics such as Pam Cook (1996) and Stella Bruzzi (1997) question whose history is being 'travestied' by the costume drama. The point for feminists in costume dramas is the contestation - as well as of officially approved 'truths' - of the principles of objectivity upon which officially approved 'truths' are founded. To feminists, the experience of intimate emotion can never be objective, nor objectively presented. Because costume dramas 'focus on the intimate emotional lives of the characters,' they thereby challenge a new kind of 'history' (Cook 1996, 72). Furthermore, costume (as masquerade) foregrounds the question, not only of what truth is, but of who gauges it and how. In that 'Costume romances mobilise history as a site of sexual fantasy rather than a record of great deeds or celebration of national heritage' (Ibid, 76), feminist critics celebrate costume's 'unruliness': Costume dramas suggest alternative visions of sexuality and to a wider than just an

academic audience. At the same time, costume itself frustrates voyeurism because it is independent of, and blocks voyeuristic access to, the body (Ibid, 51).

Furthermore, and in answer to the critics of 'heritage' films, Andy Medhurst (1996) and Sue Harper (1994) celebrate a long tradition (in Britain) of irreverent, sumptuous costume dramas. Medhurst (1996, 14) notes 'the raspberries blown at history by Sid James' Henry VIII and Kenneth Williams' Julius Caesar,' and that in the films in which they feature period verisimilitude is discarded 'for the joys of frocking about,' so that the pasts they depict are 'a playground, where costume earns its place through impact, not accuracy.' Harper (1994, 2) is attracted by the flamboyance of the Gainsborough histories for presenting a challenge to the respectable view of the past. Instead of 'history' 'embedded' within the main discourse of the film is a ' "costume narrative" whose provenance (is) sexual desire' (Harper 1994, 130). In respect of this sexual desire, Claire Monk (1995, 9) points out that heritage films have been criticised by predominantly male (apparently straight) critics. Finally, there are the post-heritage films - like *Elizabeth* (Shekhar Kapur, United Kingdom, 1998) *Shakespeare in Love* (John Madden, United Kingdom, 1998), and *La Reine Margot* (Patrice Chereau, France, 1994) - which 'in their use of sex and violence and in their self-conscious, mixed casts target a younger audience,' and, far from glossing over the past, 'mobilize violence to suggest associations with contemporary events such as the Balkans war' (Vincendeau 2001, xxi).

Nevertheless, these examples show that in spite of their feminist reclamation, costume dramas (sumptuous or otherwise) have historically been the preserve of male directors. So that whilst Bemberg is asserting a feminist right to the preserve of men, if male directors of the historical costume drama likewise subvert history, we must question whether there is anything intrinsically feminist about this. What kind of 'truth' is Bemberg's costume promoting and how are its subversions to be distinguished from the bawdy irreverence of the Carry On films? Furthermore, despite costume's celebration by feminists, the question must be answered how - especially in that her costume dramas are so sumptuous - Bemberg avoids charges of fetishising her protagonist.

4. Genre: Melodrama

Bemberg's challenge to history is nuanced by her use of melodrama. Camila and Yo. la peor de todas can be described as melodrama (more specifically as 'The Woman's Film') for their heavy use of non-diegetic music and because there is a female protagonist, who is fighting on the side of good in a world that is polarized between good and evil. Furthermore, in Camila especially is a mise-en-scène of excess. In interview (July 1984) with Alan Pauls (reproduced in King, Whitaker and Bosch 2000), Bemberg talks (Ibid, 116) of her use of melodrama as a control of excess in order to 'give truth to the phrase, "to lose one's head through love" ... I did not want to be afraid of excess.' As if to exorcise Bemberg's fear, Camila draws attention to its mode in the visual jokes of dropped handkerchiefs and thunderstorms.

What are the dominant debates concerning melodrama? Notably Thomas Elsaesser (1972), Peter Brooks (1995, originally 1976) and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (1977) have viewed melodrama as a patriarchal mode. Brooks locates melodrama's flowering after the French Revolution, which, in seeing the end of Church and Monarch, inaugurated a post-sacred world. Whilst tragedy belongs to the sacred world and is concerned with reconciliation, and comedy posits a new world, melodrama clarifies what is wrong with this world and is expression of a need to purge the social order (Brooks 1995, 198-206). The change from Church and Monarch to Republic reinstated, however, another form of patriarchal morality: the Law (Ibid, 15). In this world the role of Church and King devolved to the Father whose imperative was the preservation of the family unit. Elsaesser similarly argues that melodrama focuses the bourgeois family's struggle to protect the daughter's honour from despotic and amoral aristocrats and thus marks a struggle over the space for individual conscience and rights. Nowell-Smith identifies the Oedipal drama as melodrama's subject matter. According to him, masculinity is melodrama's only knowable heroic norm, and contradictions are involved in the production of active female characters. Such contradictions express themselves through a *mise-en-scène* of excess (which for Nowell-Smith represents melodrama's ideological failure as a patriarchal form, hence its progressive potential). Laura Mulvey (1977, 53) argues that the excess and ideological contradictions that Nowell-Smith identifies, rather than being hidden (to be revealed by textual exegesis), are melodrama's mainspring.

The 'excess' of expression is what, for Brooks, distinguishes melodrama's aesthetic from that of the modes of tragedy and comedy, all of which have

corresponding sense deprivations. Whilst blindness belongs to tragedy's concern with the human failure to see and final (sacred) revelation, and deafness belongs to comedy's miscommunications, muteness belongs to melodrama, 'the text of muteness ... since melodrama is about expression' (Brooks 1995, 57). Here Brooks touches on a paradox that in melodrama, things must be over-said because they cannot be said. Thus the frequency of tableaux at moments of climax in melodrama, 'where speech is silenced and narrative arrested in order to offer a fixed and visual representation of reactions to peripity' (Ibid, 80). Thus gestures fill a gap of muteness and melodrama's aesthetic is full of an innuendo that circumvents censorship.

Therefore, for feminists, because the characters' real desires and/or lack of self-awareness have been displaced onto the *mise-en-scène*, melodrama can, albeit indirectly, express women's desires and needs. In this sense it is a compensatory mode.⁹ Thus feminists (looking in particular at Hollywood) have reclaimed melodrama, by drawing attention to one of its sub-categories - 'The Woman's Film' - as a category of production aimed at women, about women, drawing on other cultural forms produced for women, and often by women. In that her desires have been displaced, however, melodrama - according to some feminists, like Barbara Creed (1977) - reproduces a scenario in which the woman does not speak. Creed suggests that the unspoken questions within women's melodrama are those to do with the taboo subject of women's sexuality, so that in melodrama women are contained and silenced indeed. Certainly, in likening melodrama to the 'discoveries' of psychoanalysis that

⁹ 'Melodrama operates on the same terrain as realism - i.e. the secular world of bourgeois capitalism - but offers compensation for what realism displaces' (Gledhill 1991, 208).

postulate that those denied the capacity to talk will do so through the body, Brooks (1995, xii) himself notes that the hysterical body is typically female and victimized, and 'on which desire has inscribed an impossible history, a story of desire in an impasse.' It therefore must be asked how Bemberg contravenes the melodramatic mode to make possible the history of her female protagonist's desire.

Finally, critics have noted how in Latin America, melodrama is used to rework national history - in other words, to make a possible history. Its excess (over-saying things that cannot be said) does this. Carlos Monsiváis (quoted in López 1994, 256) suggests that the excess of melodrama is Latin America's answer to competition with North America, which 'is impossible artistically or technically (so that) the only defense is excess, the absence of the limits of melodrama.' Furthermore, melodrama, as Ana López (1994, 256) posits, is a mode particularly apt to Hispanic culture which, carrying 'the burden of its Christianity,' needs melodrama's consolations. Susan Sontag (1994, 137) argues that Christianity is already melodramatic rather than tragic for 'every crucifixion must be topped by a resurrection.' Questions of resurrection are vital to Bemberg's hope for Argentina's future - towards which we have seen her historical project motivated. Thus, because the historical Sor Juana and the historical Camila were abject under the patriarchal regimes of Church and State, the pertinent question is how - in Bemberg's hands - they still resist.

This chapter explores how Bemberg makes use of the historical costume drama and melodrama to aid her protagonists' resistance. If the Latin American excess

of melodrama is carried over into Bemberg's use of costume, which excess is part also of Bemberg's challenge to 'straight' history, analysis of the sexual use of costume must nevertheless answer how Bemberg subverts the voyeuristic look at her spectacular women. Thus any analysis of her choice of genres that favour sumptuous mise en scènes, must work as much with the feminist theoretical analysis of the films' sensuous celebrations of feminine beauty, as with the consideration of the films' representations of, and challenges to, 'history.'

5. Camila

The protagonist of Camila was a real woman. Camila O'Gorman was the fifth of six children and the youngest daughter of Adolfo O'Gorman y Perichón Vandeuil and Joaquina Ximénes Pinto. The O'Gormans were a respectable middle-class family of Buenos Aires. The family was a close acquaintance and supporter of the brutal nineteenth-century Argentine dictator, the Federalist Juan Manuel de Rosas (1829-1852) who maintained his authority and discipline by cut-throat gangs. These gangs were free to kill anyone who did not profess their support of Rosas by wearing his red emblem on the left side of their chests. Rosas' regime was sanctioned and bolstered by the Catholic Church. Ladislao Gutiérrez, nephew to the governor of Tucumán, arrived in Buenos Aires as a young priest at the age of twenty-three. He had letters of introduction from his uncle to Rosas and to prominent families like the O'Gormans. When Camila and Ladislao became lovers and eloped, they were pursued by Rosas and eventually tracked down, imprisoned, and executed in 1848.

Even though Camila came from a lineage of transgressive women (her grandmother, Ana María Perichón de Vandeuil, 'La Perichona,' was subject to house arrest by her son for a treasonable affair with the royalist viceroy Santiago de Liniers, between 1807-1809), the perpetrator of the crime was seen to be the man who had seduced the girl. The Buenos Aires newspaper El Comercio (4 January 1848) asked, 'Is there on earth a sufficiently severe punishment for a man who behaves this way with a woman whose dishonour he cannot repair by marrying her?' Because Ladislao's crime lay in his exposure of the patriarchal system as weak, the executions were Rosas' warning not to doubt patriarchal authority. Nevertheless, Rosas' political enemies were quick to say, when Camila was executed, that she had been eight months pregnant. Whilst this has never been verified, it helps explain why the focus of dramatic and historic attention has always been on Camila, and how her murder has come to encapsulate the brutality of the regime.

Much of the evidence about Camila comes from her conversations with her jailer, Antonio Reyes (recorded in Stevens 1997, 85-102). By 1984 (the year of the film's release), the story of Camila O'Gorman had achieved mythical status in Argentina. It had been told to Argentinians by many texts; most popularly in the novella, Una sombra donde sueña Camila O'Gorman/A Shadow Where Camila O'Gorman Dreams (Enrique Molina, 1973). Jason Wilson (2000, 175) says Molina 'later crossed swords with (Bemberg) because she did not acknowledge' him, but Bemberg always argued that the story of Camila was part of the cultural patrimony, and was not based on Molina's book. Nevertheless,

whilst Bemberg drew on the legendary status of Camila (and perhaps her romanticization in Molina's novel), she was out to challenge the idea 'that Camila was "a sweet innocent - seduced by a virile priest."' ¹⁰ Thus, whilst all previous versions (including Molina's) had concentrated on the transgressive action, Bemberg's innovations were those of character. She made Camila the agent of seduction - and therefore of the narrative. In Bemberg's hands the lovers' transgression becomes redefined as Camila's transgression and the narrative is set in motion by the heroine's sexual desire, so that she defies the patriarchal obstacles of Father, Church and State. ¹¹ Bemberg's innovations here return us to Reyes's evidence concerning Camila's defiant character. ¹²

A. Textual Analysis

The analysis of this chapter will exemplify how Camila's narrative transgression and resistance is reinforced through costume and mise-en-scène. Examination of Camila's 'look' will explore three key points concerning Bemberg's historical representations. The first point concerns Bemberg's challenge to the Catholic Church and her attendant circumvention of state (and self-) censorship. The second point concerns Bemberg's use of costume to underline her heroine's story of transgression. The third point takes account of Bemberg's recourse to melodrama as an aid to re-invoking and mourning her nation's history.

¹⁰ In *Diario Popular* (Buenos Aires, 17 August 1983).

¹¹ Although Camila's resistance is intellectual as well as sexual, her reading of illicit 'romantic' books serves the sexual transgression and is therefore subservient to it.

¹² Reyes says that when the pair was brought to the military prison at Santos Lugares, Camila spoke with ease and - baring her abdomen - announced that she needed a doctor: 'Can't you see my condition?' Reyes advised Camila to rely on the 'weakness' of her sex and beg Rosas for clemency. This indicates two things: that Reyes believed that she was pregnant, and that she was not showing proper feminine subordination. Reyes tried to soften her shackles with cloth, but Camila showed defiance in stating she would endure the punishment with pleasure, especially as Ladislao was shackled too.

i. Self-Censorship and the Catholic Church

Camila's father is the composite representation of the military dictator and the Argentine Catholic Church, both of whom Camila's actions defy. Although it is unlikely that Camila's father was as vindictive as the film makes out, there are censorship (as well as feminist) reasons why Bemberg made Camila's father into a villain.¹³ Camila O'Gorman's story would itself make an interesting study in censorship. Pierre Sorlin (1980, 24) points out that 'Only what is relatively important politically is censored.' Bemberg's film may have been born with democracy but the Argentine Church - threatened by Camila's defiance of its patriarchal power and its support of her murder by a dictator - continues to refuse discussion of Camila's story.¹⁴ *Camila* rewrites two histories. As well as the romanticised one of the nineteenth-century Camila, it rewrites Argentina's recent 'Dirty War' past. In both histories Bemberg accuses the Catholic Church.¹⁵ Nevertheless, as a Catholic, Bemberg first showed her script to her confessor. Thus the most ingrained censorship that she had to overcome was her own. Marc Ferro (1988, 17-34) suggests that a society that produces a film makes itself felt by its censorship and self-censorship, both of which he calls lapses. In the lapse can be seen another 'meaning.' I would argue that Bemberg's film can be read not so much for its lapses but for its reinscriptions.

¹³ The historical Camila's father waited nine days after the lovers had fled from Buenos Aires, before he wrote to Rosas (21 December 1857) trying to hush things up. The letter shows some sympathy with Camila. He denounces Ladislao as the perpetrator of a crime against his daughter and his family. Ladislao 'stole her away.' He refers to the singular 'he' in surmise of what they are now up to, and where headed. There is also a tone of appeal - as one father to another in: 'I find a consolation in sharing with you the desolation in which all the family is submerged' (in Stevens 1997, 100-101). Nevertheless, Rosas advertised the family's disgrace.

¹⁴ Today, there is no mention of Camila in the church of *Nuestra Señora del Pilar* in Recoleta, Buenos Aires, where her confessions to Ladislao took place.

¹⁵ Chapter Five's analysis of the representation of priests will show that Ladislao himself does not escape Bemberg's censure.

It reinscribes the sense of the repressive power of the Catholic Church in Argentina, and in so doing it challenges any lapses to which Bemberg herself was prone. Nevertheless, Bemberg reinscribes by circumvention. Firstly, she circumvents censorship (of the State and of the self) by making the father in Camila bear the weight of State and Church patriarchal evil. Secondly, Bemberg circumvents censorship through melodrama's aesthetic innuendo. The heightened innuendo of melodrama is clear in the scene in which, when he is informed of Camila's elopement, her father is cutting out the uterus of a cow. We are not spared bloody close ups. The cross cutting between bloody dismembered cow and badge makes the colour of Rosas that Camila's father carries on his lapel equivalent to that of the ultimate in misogyny upon which both of their states of terror are predicated: Both qualities of red signify the violence of rape. Nevertheless, when the colour red is applied to Camila, its connotations change from bloody violence to sexual passion and truth, becoming the badge of resistance. Thus, instead of directly accusing the Church, Bemberg pits Camila's love against its prohibitions in a colour symbolism that suggests life and passion (Camila's red shawl) versus death (ecclesiastical black).¹⁶

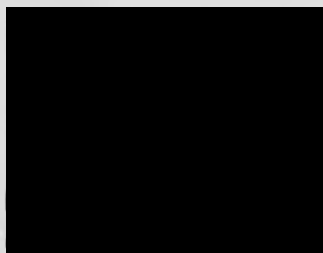
ii. Costume Reinforcing Resistance

One scene - when Camila visits Ladislao's sickroom (he is sick because he is repressing the excess of his own passions) - particularly illustrates the use of red to signal her passion's resistance to patriarchal dictates. This scene is juxtaposed against the funeral of Camila's grandmother, in which even the red

¹⁶ In interview (July 1984) with Alan Pauls (reproduced in King, Whitaker and Bosch 2000), Bemberg says (Ibid, 121) that red signifies violence and passion, 'the two axes of the film,' that black is an 'ecclesiastical colour, the colour of authority and patriarchy' and that 'white is for purity.' Pink connotes something 'very fragile, very feminine.'

badges of Rosas are muted in the predominantly black and dark tones of the cinematography. Camila prematurely leaves this scene of death to visit Ladislao and her sexual destiny. She walks into the sunlight, so that what she puts on to hide herself - her red shawl - brightens as she walks towards the camera and

through a blue light: Fig.3.1



The same

brightening of the light then picks out the initials of a woman,

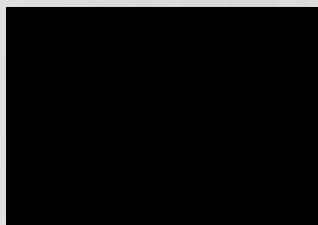
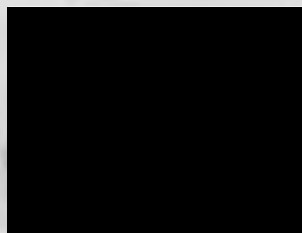


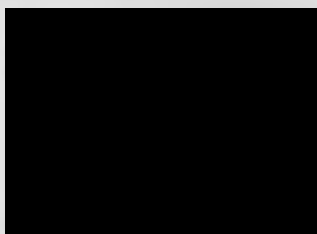
Fig.3.2, who in life was famed as a lover. Sound

has underscored the interplay between life and death. The intoning of the funeral bell, and the voices of the mourners reciting their prayers carries over into the cloisters and Camila's journey to the priest. But birdsong begins at the moment she enters the halo of blue light, so that her actions of love are announced as a dawning that is sanctified. Furthermore, this light distinguishes Camila from the priest who (in Fig.3.1) is standing in darkness to the side.

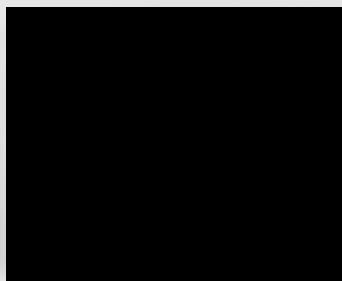
As Camila nears Ladislao's door all sound is abruptly cut off. The camera tracks her until she and it come to rest against a doorway. A mid-close-up shot of her shawl against the darker backdrop of her black dress and the door against which she leans is held for three seconds:

**Fig.3.3**

These patterns of colour are mirrored with the cut to Camila - again in mid-close-up - on the door's other side (inside

**Fig.3.4**

Ladislao's room): She is still haloed, but now by natural sunlight. Once the door is shut the image is given the stillness of a photograph. Her hesitant pose whilst the camera now moves in (Fig.3.5) to frame her more tightly, underlines the strength of the social prohibitions against which Camila's love for Ladislao must pit itself:

**Fig.3.5.**

The sense of these proscriptions are reinforced by the harsh (and only) ambient sound of the opening and closing of the door. The rest of the scene is in silence, except for the sound of the priest's sighs. Camila's red shawl and its connotations of passion dominate the frame. The halo effect (now produced by

her shadow) continues, so that her passion is read as righteous. Camila brings the colour into the next shot (of Ladislao in white, stretched out in bed and the foreground) when she enters the frame from the right but further back:

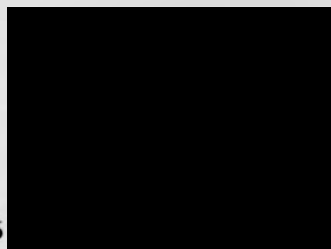
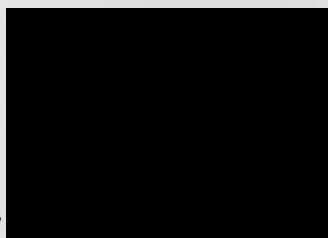


Fig3.6

Then she kisses him. We get a clear view

of Ladislao's torso as (finally) he turns towards us at the extreme front of the



screen: **Fig.3.7**

We experience his body, not

hers. Camila is covered by her dark dress and deep red shawl. Nevertheless, if the expression of erotic longing in this scene is Ladislao's, in Camila's movement and his prone passivity we read her agency and his vulnerability.

This sequence exemplifies how on Camila red is transmuted from the violence of rape to the rightness of love and its free sexual expression. The quality of red here is not sumptuous. It is symbol of passion but not in itself erotic. The shawl has prevented us (not just because of the function of hiding that Camila assigns to it) from looking through it to or at her. Although it stands out it is of a piece with the somberness suggested by Camila's funereal black. At her elopement with Ladislao, Camila's shawl becomes the bundle in which she ties up (sacrifices to love) all her worldly wealth. They first make love (in the carriage) against a backdrop of red. Thus costume symbolism reinforces the story of the

protagonist's resistance. Camila effects the transposition - through the speaking of her desire - from death to life. Such a shift suggests that the first defiance of patriarchal repression must be sexual. Thus Camila anticipates those 1990s' post-heritage films that show 'an overt concern with sexuality and gender, particularly non-dominant gender and sexual identities' (Monk 1995, 7). Nevertheless, the film has made clear that, banned as she was from the sphere of politics (Camila's mother says that women should 'eat and be silent'), the only available transgression to woman in the 1800s was sexual, even though Camila - as in the film, her reading of illicit literature makes clear - desired an intellectual transgression too.

iii. Confrontation of Trauma: Melodrama and Mourning

Camila does more than rewrite its protagonist's sexual resistance within the family. The film confronts Argentina's recent trauma. If Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) suggest that national identity is shaped out of the rediscovery of existing myths and symbols with collective value, and Smith (1996) asserts that nations are a product of a territorialisation of memory, Susan Hayward (2000) asks what happens to a nation that has suffered erasure of its collective memory. Although she cites those nations coming out of colonialism, post-colonialism or post-apartheid, her question could apply to Argentina where people looked the other way.¹⁷ Camila reinscribes censored issues into the collective memory, by rewriting a previous myth and thereby both forces memory open and enables a collective mourning. Both the Church and People understood this. Chapter One has seen two million people weeping at a Camila that their Church strongly

¹⁷ Refusal to speak of these things is made clear in the name - A Wall of Silence - of Lita Stantic's (1994) film that is explicit about the disappearances.

denounced. Both reactions proceed from the same recognition. In a review shortly after the film's release Teresa Alfieri (*La Prensa*, Buenos Aires, 24 June 1984) stated that the scene of the death of the lovers,

in which we see them shot and bloodied in a communal coffin, evokes for the spectator the most repressed fantasies that they had thought expelled from their consciences: the memory of other young corpses thrown together in communal graves, opened up like incurable wounds in our recent history.

The final sequence of the execution (of fifty-five shots) exemplifies Bemberg's use of melodrama for confronting painful national issues and addressing issues of mourning and conscience. There are three sub-sequences. In the first, Camila is taken to Ladislao; they look intensely at each other before they are tied to their chairs, blindfolded, and carried outside. The second sequence, outside in the open, comprises shots counterpointing watching prisoners and soldiers, and shots detailing the placement of the lovers in their execution seats and the execution. Once in their execution seats the lovers look for each other. Camila calls out, 'Are you there, Ladislao?' She looks the wrong way for his reply, 'At your side, Camila.' We see their separate shootings (Ladislao first), and the soldiers' reluctance to kill Camila. Finally, is the disposal in the coffin. The fade on them together in the coffin ends the film.

Just before the march to the execution begins, we see the lovers tied in their chairs. As some single notes of a piano begin, they are given a private moment

of looking (to which - because shot from behind - we are witness but not privy),

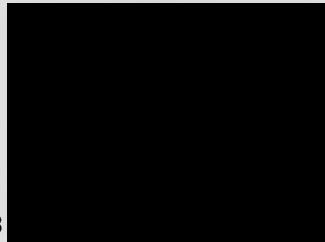
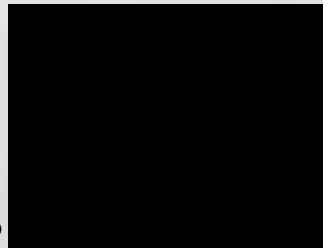


Fig.3.8 the emotional burden of which is expressed through music rather than speech. As the march to the execution begins, this music swells into full orchestration. This continues as they are brought out into the open, but in shot eighteen, the camera, after tracking the



cortège, **Fig.3.9** moves ahead of it to frame the empty seats awaiting them:

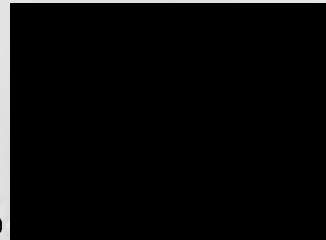


Fig.3.10 At this point the ambient sound of a bleak wind is heard which continues until the final shot of the scene. Thus we witness their executions in silence apart from the gunshots and Camila's cry out to Ladislao.

When Camila and Ladislao are carried out into the prison yard the counterpointing in four shots (fourteen-seventeen) between prisoners and soldiers (Figs.3.11, 3.12 & 3.13) is eloquent both of their contrast and of their

shared complicity, and will be picked up in the final sequence of execution.¹⁸

The fourteenth shot shows the first close up of the watching prisoners; they are holding onto bars. As a long tracking shot it enumerates them all in a collectivity of witness and mourning. As the camera stops on two prisoners,

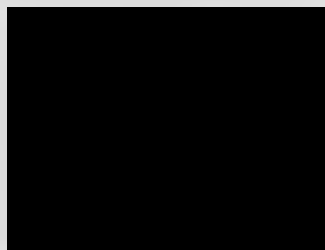


Fig.3.11 we register their pained witness. (They will witness - with the sequence of their shootings and placement in the coffin - the lovers' final defiance of their enforced separation.) The next cut to the ranged soldiers is startlingly red,

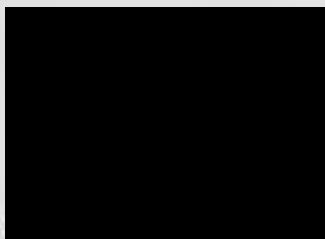


Fig.3.12 before a framing cut to the prisoners again. Then is another cut to the soldiers who are impassive and looking down:

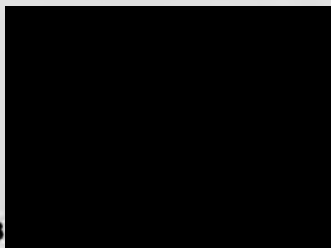
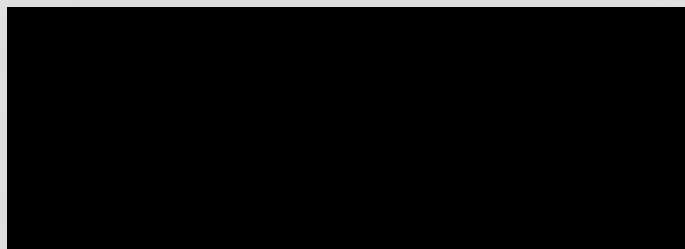


Fig.3.13 When Camila is finally shot (after the soldiers in their shame and pity twice fail),

¹⁸ Note that whilst Figs.3.11 to 3.13 are captured chronologically, they do not comprise all four shots of the sequence between prisoners and soldiers that is under discussion.

**Fig.3.14****Fig.3.15,**

she falls to the floor in a mid-close-up shot:

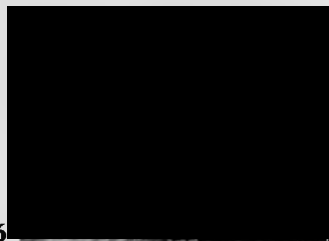


Fig.3.16 The camera moves in to frame the upper parts of the lovers' prone bodies together:

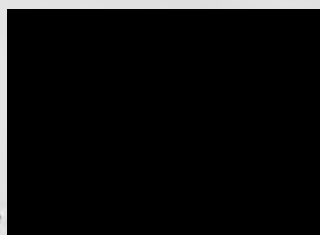


Fig.3.17 This image provides consolation to two earlier shots, one of Ladislao, dead and alone (shot thirty-five, fourteen shots earlier) and one of Camila, still alive and alone (shot thirty-six):

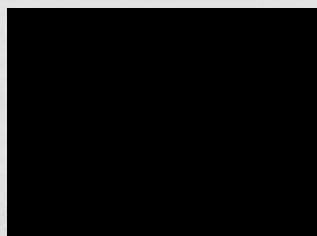
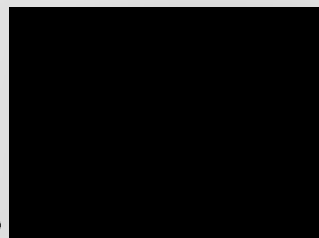
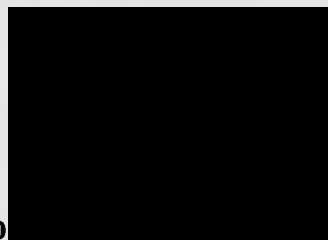


Fig.3.18 The next shot (Fig.3.19) - one of the longest of the sequence at fourteen seconds - echoes the earlier counterpointing (Figs. 3.11, 3.12 & 3.13) of prisoners and soldiers. Its panning from the soldiers on the left to the prisoners on the right means that at one point they come into

the frame together and so are identified: **Fig.3.19**



The vantage point of the next long crane shot provides some brief respite and distance as the soldiers move in towards the bodies and put them in the coffin. Here the sound of shuffling feet - reinforcing an absence of all other sound - begins and continues to the end. Now is a jump cut to a closer view of this action, before the next shot - angled upwards from below to two soldiers at the top of some ramparts and the Argentine flag waving in the wind - disorients



our looking: **Fig.3.20**

From a (crane-shot)

viewpoint of the raised flag, the final shot (showing the pair in the coffin),

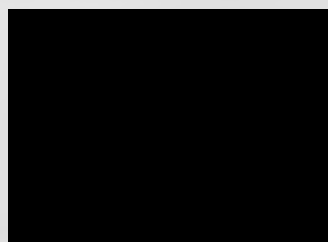
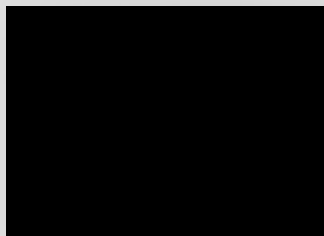


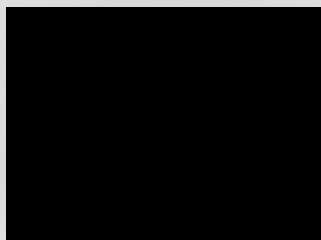
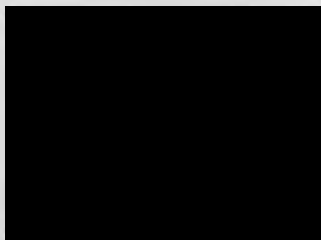
Fig.3.21

moves into a close up so that they are

tightly framed:

**Fig.3.22.**

Their heads are touching. The blood on their chests remains clear. On Camila's call to Ladislao - this time 'from beyond the grave' - a single piano note begins the reprise of the earlier fully-orchestrated music (allowing consolation as well as grief), before the fade,

**Fig.3.23,**

into the credits: **Fig.3.24**

How does this scene re-invoke an entire nation's repressed past? Whilst the Argentine flag accuses the nation state of murder, visual weight is accorded to the watching prisoners, which suggests a collective re-awakening of the repressed. At the same time their helplessness somewhat palliates the anger of this scene's accusation whose full force is reserved to the agents of the State.

Colour symbolizes these different aspects of re-awakening: the red of the soldiers' uniforms speaks a guilt that is exaggerated against the drab whites and browns of the prisoners, the lovers and the prison walls. This red is then picked out and equated with the red blood of passion on the murdered lovers' chests. The startling contrast of colour provided by the watching prisoners also marks their act of witness. Meanwhile the action - whose gravity we often witness in a silence reinforced by soft ambient sounds of shuffling feet and of the wind - is at times counterpointed with a music that releases the tears and thus enacts mourning at the same time that it consoles. The collective memory has been forced open and, if the wounds are incurable, there has been consolation through melodrama's music and through dramatic staging.¹⁹

Bemberg is not alone among women directors in using the melodramatic mode and an individual heroine to stimulate the nation's conscience towards mourning, but also, to console. A comparison between Margarethe von Trotta's Marianne and Juliane (West Germany, 1981) and Camila exemplifies how both directors use melodrama to expose 'the hidden resemblances between the politics of the private sphere and the politics of the state' (Linville 1998, 85). In Marianne and Juliane the memories of the protagonist, Juliane (Jutta Lampe) return us to her childhood and adolescence. Her father is a protestant minister. She and her sister, Marianne (Barbara Sukowa), are of the generation that is faced with the responsibility of confronting the Nazi past.²⁰ Although von Trotta's film is not in costume, one scene exemplifies her melodramatic use of

¹⁹ Chakravarty (1991, 297) quotes Robert Stam's suggestion that the melodramatic mode provides 'the consolations of form.'

²⁰ For a fuller synopsis of this film see Appendix Six, Maria Luisa Bemberg and Margarethe von Trotta.

colour, which is similar to Bemberg's. In one flashback the children are going upstairs to bed. They (and the camera in their point-of-view shot) are arrested by their father's gory painting of the crucifix: 'Bathed in red light, the scene suggests the father's frenzied, heartless tyranny and the daughters' abject sense of guilt, but also a potent kernel of sororal solidarity and resistance' (Linville, 106). Thus this scene exemplifies some further affinities with Camila in addressing the political context of the filmmaker's recent past, and more particularly in equating State terrorisms with the terrorism of Patriarchy. From the outset (in Julianne's interior flashbacks to the mid-1950s that show a concern with remembering the history of the repressed) the film focuses on the process of reconstructing history. For von Trotta as for Bemberg such a process is feminist: In school Julianne rejects Rilke's Autumn Day as evasively kitsch, and argues instead for Brecht's Ballad of the Jewish Whore.

If in the use of documentary footage (of Nazi women guards), and in the explicit discussions between the sisters, von Trotta addresses her country's shameful past more directly than does Bemberg, Camila (paradoxically) is more 'simplistic' or forthright in its political condemnations. Its protagonists' deaths evoked repressed fantasies in the audience by subverting rules not - now, in 1984 - of censorship, but of self-censorship. No-one was allowed anymore to look the other way. In Argentina the Mothers and the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo have made it clear that the remembering of history falls to the woman. Raymond Williams (1989, 195) suggests that because tears have become devalued, it falls upon women to act in this manner for the state. Furthermore, as a category of production aimed at women and about women,

melodrama says that it is woman's job to mourn.²¹ In Camila, one woman is mourned, and one woman (the director) instigates the mourning. If in melodrama's final muteness, Camila herself does not cry, the tears are there. They are (were) handed over to the audience. In the case of Camila, melodrama's engagement with private emotion indeed instigated a public mourning, touching a popular nerve. Thus the mourning instigated is a collective responsibility and not just that of women.

The huge Argentine audience appeared, as Alfieri declared, to read the film as their own most recent 'story.' Camila is Bemberg's first film in which big stars appear. If star appeal constructs a new form of audience participation through 'an appeal to its sympathetic emotions in the working out of poetic justice' (Gledhill 1991, 225), it aids Bemberg's contestation of official history through melodrama. Bemberg's re-writing of history is about 'poetic justice.' Nevertheless, the justice has involved questions of complicity. The Argentine audience understood with Camila that they were not just weeping for their 'disappeared.' As John King (1990, 96) states, they were weeping for their own complicity.²² Thus, because as Alfieri's review stated, the wounds re-opened were incurable, it is significant that Camila denies catharsis (thus acceptance of the lovers' murder) that a tragic mode would have enabled. It is only in the scene of execution that (apart from their lines from beyond the grave) Ladislao

²¹ According to Susan Linville (1998, 87), New German films by men do not represent the task of mourning 'with comparable emotional forthrightness' to those by women.

²² Griselda Gambaro (1928-), a dramatist rooted in the Argentine grotesque, similarly faced her audience - but four years later than did Camila - with its collaboration or complicity in 'disappearing' the different. Gambaro's Antígona Furiosa (1988) is a dramatisation of the struggle of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo to recover their children's corpses. Written after the trial of the generals, it deals with the popular compliance with terror.

and Camila do not speak, except through their looking.²³ Here, for the first time in the film, the lovers reinforce Brooks' 'text of muteness.'

B. Camila's Use of Genre

Camila makes important use of melodrama. Firstly, textual analysis has posited that - in Camila's appeal to violent colours and emotions - Bemberg uses melodrama's aesthetic innuendo to circumvent censorship. Secondly, if melodrama is 'the drama of morality' (Brooks 1995, 20), Bemberg uses the melodrama's validation of the individual as the source of morality and ethics in a post-sacred world. As agent of her own desires, Bemberg's melodramatic heroine is aligned with the moral forces of unequivocal good against unequivocal evil. Camila's moral validation is compensation for Camila's history, which the film's melodramatic mode renders sorrowful rather than tragic. Here Bemberg is perhaps particularly Latin American, as in Hispanic Catholic. Thirdly, however, Camila's fight, whilst validated by the melodramatic mode, transgresses one of the mode's expectations: the reinforcement of patriarchal law. Bemberg's recourse to melodrama underscores the shock, possibility and daring of Camila's transgression of the patriarchal boundaries that hem her in. Fourthly, Bemberg draws on the compensations of melodrama. This was necessary to a film such as Camila, which spoke so directly to a recent as well as more distant tragic Argentine past. The consolation is enabled by the pacing of the music in the final scene. However, whilst the target of Bemberg's condemnations is the Catholic Church and its repressions, her audience is made to feel - through aesthetic innuendo -

²³ The above synopsis has quoted these lines: 'Are you there, Ladislao?' 'At your side, Camila.'

its own complicity in history. Thus the music accuses as well as consoles in its invitation to mourn. Nevertheless, fifthly, Camila's desire is punished by the State only after she has proved the possibility of that desire's history. In this sense also Bemberg turns melodrama's inscriptions on their heads. Camila herself subverts the form (the 'text of muteness') by speaking. She speaks her desires verbally and narratively by seducing and eloping with the priest. (She further states her desires textually, by controlling - as Chapter Five will show - the film's articulation of the gaze.) Thus her statement is unequivocal. By having Camila so roundly speak her desire, Bemberg restores the female protagonist from her silent - what Griselda Pollock (1977) identifies as her lost - position.²⁴ Camila's desire challenges film - as well as national - history, and the film itself contravenes as well as uses melodrama's connotations.

In making its audience feel its complicity, Camila also answers the criticisms of heritage films. Camila is a text that addresses the trouble of the Argentine past and thus reverses the thrust of (what is levied against) most heritage films. Camila may be a film of grand spectacle but it is not 'glossy' heritage. The film may provide consolation, but it does not allow acceptance. Furthermore, such consolation is one that is made possible only through an address of national problems in the present. As La Reine Margot presents a bloody and grimy seventeenth-century France, so Camila presents Argentina with its bloody and brutal histories. Thus Camila is history, not heritage, and is closer to those

²⁴ Pollock (1977) posits the 'repressed feminine' as the key to understanding melodrama. She argues that the social position of the mother (in western society) is vital to the perpetuation both of capitalist social relations and patriarchal dominance. These demand the subjugation of female sexuality in social and cultural life. Of importance to the argument here is the fact that melodrama's construction of femininity is understood by Pollock not simply as an empty, negative, passive space, but as something positively lost.

French historical films of which Ginette Vincendeau talks (2001, xix-xx) that 'tend not to present a rosy view of the past and thus differ significantly from the turn-of-the-century bourgeois domesticity' of the British heritage films. Finally, the audience for Camila was predominantly a young one. In this respect we may say that Bemberg's subversions of the melodramatic mode are working with the film's 'post-heritage' self-referential subversions.

6. Yo, la peor de todas

How is Bemberg using genre to tell the story of the real Sor Juana? In Bemberg's 'Mexican' film the heroine's transgressions (those that motivate the narrative) are intellectual. The real Juana Ramírez de Asbaje was born (one of six illegitimate children) to Isabel Ramírez de Asbaje in Chimalhuacán, Mexico in 1648. Juana tells us that she could read at the age of three, and wished to go to the university, but as this was only open to men in the 17th century, she resolved to dress in men's clothes. At the age of eight she was sent to relatives in Mexico City who presented her at the age of fifteen to the marquise de Mancera, as a lady-in-waiting. She was there for four years, and was reputed lively, narcissistic, flirtatious and erudite. In 1669, she took her final vows at the liberal Convent of San Jerónimo to gain the space to read and to write. There her legendary learning and wit secured her the patronage of a succession of viceroys who delighted to attend her audiences behind the bars of the convent's visiting room. She wrote many poems, notably Primero sueño/First Dream (1685).

In the years 1680-1688 Juana received the protection of the Spanish viceroy and vicereine, the Manriques de Lara y Gonzaga. She wrote some poems to the vicereine, María Luisa. Back in Madrid the vicereine had a first volume of Juana's poetry published, and Juana's fame as the 'tenth muse' spread around the Spanish-speaking world. The vicereine's departure left Juana vulnerable to the Inquisitorial machinations of the Church. Nevertheless, she dared to write a critique of the sermon of a Portuguese Jesuit priest, Padre Antonio Vieyra, who was closely associated with the interests of the Mexican Church, and whose tolerance she thereby forfeited. She had been tricked into composing this tract by a scheming Bishop of Puebla, Don Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, who had promised that it would never be published. He had however his own agenda against the Archbishop of Mexico, Aguiar y Seijas. Juana's sense of betrayal at its publication and her consequent disgrace is expressed in her autobiographical reply Respuesta a Sor Filotea (1691). Nevertheless, she renounced her poetry and ideas, by signing at the end of her life, a confession that she, 'the worst woman of all', was unworthy. She died of the plague in 1695 aged forty-seven.

As opposed to the controversy surrounding Camila. Yo, la peor de todas acknowledges its adaptation of Octavio Paz' 1982 biography of Sor Juana which seeks to reconstitute the truth of Sor Juana's final days.²⁵ Paz contends that although Juana's renunciation of her learning was the result of having been caught up in an argument between powerful men, it was an argument in which she chose to intervene. Bemberg, however, sees Sor Juana as an innocent pawn in their game of intrigue. Furthermore, Paz argues that Juana transgressed the

²⁵ Note that references in this chapter are made to the 1988 British edition of Paz' book.

Church solely in her wish to extend the bounds of permitted knowledge, whereas Bemberg suggests that the thinking nun threatened the Church as a woman. She has Sor Juana say that 'Knowledge is always a transgression - especially for a woman.' Thus Bemberg's heroine's intellectual (rather than sexual) resistance is as a woman to a misogynistic church. Yo, la peor de todas (like Camila) is pitted against an Argentine Catholic Church which represses the story not only of Camila but of Sor Juana.²⁶

Furthermore, Paz' contention (1988, 469) is that as victim of Puebla's intrigue, Juana was condemned to signing her confession out of sincerely felt guilt, but a guilt that was not true to her maintained beliefs, and that on that day she was neither 'enchantly good' nor 'arrestingly saintly' as her former biographers would have us believe. Bemberg says her project was to depict Paz' thinking rather than a saintly woman. She sought spectator identification with a thinking, and not a sensual, woman because 'Thinking women can find very few women with whom to identify on the screen' (in Burton-Carvajal 1997, 78). It therefore must be asked not only how she uses the costume drama to assist her project, but how 'enchantly' Bemberg does or does not present Juana. Finally, analysis must ascertain how involved in Juana's intellectual transgression as a woman is the question of her sexuality (for the playing down of which, Chapter One has seen the film receive some criticism).

²⁶ The story of Latin America's great woman thinker is still popularly unknown in Argentina. That this situation continues in a country proud of its intellectual credentials is remarkable.

A. Textual Analysis

Analysis of Yo, la peor de todas will thus explore three key points concerning Bemberg's historical representations. The first point concerns Bemberg's attack on the Catholic Church. The second point concerns Bemberg's use of costume, asking whether it reinforces her heroine's intellectual defiance. (Here the analysis must answer whether Bemberg's use of the costume drama and of film style promotes an 'intellectual identification' at the expense of, or with, a sensual identification.) The third point is concerned with how far Bemberg involves the intellectual with a sexual defiance (thereby addressing the problematic question of the nun's sexuality). All analyses will involve comparison to Paz's arguments.

i. Bemberg's Accusations of the Catholic Church

Juana's mind broke beyond the ecclesiastical limits placed upon intellectual thought in the seventeenth century. For Paz (1998, 6), Sor Juana's transgression was the outburst of 'the other voice'; that voice that violates the code of what is utterable in every age and society and 'Such transgressions were, and are, punished with severity.'²⁷ The historical Sor Juana bears out this interpretation of her transgression when in her Reply to Sister Filotea or Intellectual Autobiography (1997) she talks of her almost criminal love of learning. Advantage was taken of this other voice, not by men because they were men, but because they were powerful men, pitted against each other. This caused her downfall (Paz 1988, 402). Furthermore, Paz (1988, 403) acknowledges Juana's own motive of challenging the Archbishop's misogyny, so that 'Sor Juana

²⁷ That Juana's transgressions were only intellectual is underlined by Paz when he makes it clear that she was never daring enough to be critical of the system, noting throughout his book her silence on the topics of Spanish Imperialism and its conversion programmes.

intervened in the quarrel between two powerful princes of the Roman Church and was destroyed in the process.'

Bemberg's sequence dealing with the Bishop of Puebla's instigation of Juana's polemical essay, suggests that Sor Juana was completely deceived, however. This begins with a scene between the new viceroy (Héctor Altero) and two men - Puebla (Franklin Caicedo) and the poet Sigüenza - whose backs, to the right and left of the frame, respectively, are flanking him. They are at conference upon the Archbishop's excesses. The viceroy's eyes, directed obliquely to the right of the screen, acknowledge only Puebla who mutters that 'We can merely punish him ...' Now there is a protracted close up on him thinking. He eventually continues: '... with a provocation.' At this point there is a freeze whilst against the frame comes the external-diegetic sound of Juana reading the later result of these ruminations. A few seconds later, there is a cut to Juana who is behind the grille - still reading. We see her in long-shot, over, and including, Puebla's back. The inference (the tiger has seized the lamb) is underlined in all subsequent shot/countershots in which, however, all cuts to extremer close ups of Puebla reveal the menace of sinister intrigue in his smile. Furthermore, in underlining Sor Juana's reluctance to intervene politically, 'Neither do I wish that the snake should bite me,' to which Puebla ingenuously replies, 'Please - no-one's going to publish it,' Bemberg reinforces both the context of clear manipulation and the entire 'innocence' of the nun, which Paz disclaims.

Accordingly, the next sequence - in which nun accounts to Archbishop (Lautaro Murúa) - shows Juana's abandonment. Juana is visited by her confessor,

Antonio Núñez de Miranda (Alberto Segado), the Bishop of Puebla (who now has published her diatribe) and the Archbishop. The latter asks her to identify her 'persecutors.' She will not, except to name one of them by his pseudonym of Sor Filotea. The camera, however, twice accuses Puebla by cutting to and moving into close ups on him while Juana presents her defence of having obeyed a man of the Church who will not defend her, and who remains silent. These takes allow for his two long, slow and obliquely sideways looks, which in contrast to the one of Miranda looking to the floor, suggest slyness and lack of shame. Moreover, Puebla's cruel deception is underwritten by the progression of the narrative: the two sequences under discussion (that of the 'manipulation' of Juana, and now the Archbishop's response), have been separated by a third one, leaving us to absorb the implication that it was during this (Juana's visit to her dying mother) that the conspiracy of publication took effect.²⁸ This is not part of Paz' argument. Moreover, when the Archbishop castigates Miranda for having trusted the judgement of a woman, Juana is framed in extreme-close-up to say, 'Ah, finally you've said it ... if I weren't a woman, it wouldn't matter.' She grabs his hand and makes him smell her own. Her parting shot to the Archbishop is that he bears the devil in his heart. Although Paz does not deny the Archbishop's misogyny, he does not see in it a direct argument for Juana's abandonment. Thus Bemberg is condensing separate arguments to reinforce a feminist theme, which is that the nun's betrayal is a conspiracy of misogynist men. Here Bemberg particularly accuses the Catholic Church's misogyny. Miranda closes the scene by telling her to find another confessor. The camera

²⁸ We (but not Sor Juana) have earlier learned of the fact of publication through Sigüenza's accusation of Puebla. The latter hides behind his office: 'I am the Bishop. You cannot arraign me.' He explains that it was merely a joke, and that he does not want to further sour his relations with the Archbishop.

moves backwards with him, leaving a receding image of Juana expressing surprised disbelief. Her arm, holding onto the bars, is outstretched along the frame and suggests her abandonment.

The sense of Juana's abandonment works with the lighting (which picks out a saintly halo on her forehead and runs along her arm) to invoke her martyrdom. Thus in its treatment of Juana's transgressions, it is arguable that the film, more than the book, inscribes Sor Juana as a victim, so that her final abdication to her confessor is all of a piece: Although the film portrays an ambiguity in that Juana 'abdicates' from the 'frame' of her confession,

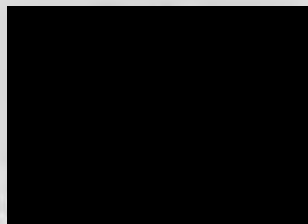


Fig.3.25 it does not underline that 'she was simply

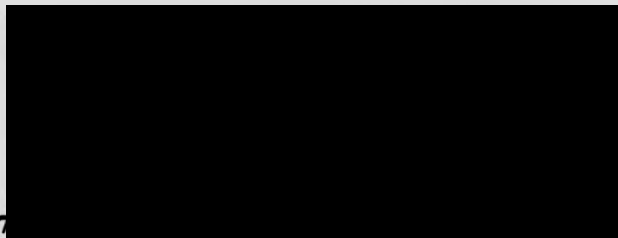
using a common formula of vilification' (Paz 1988, 468). Whereas Paz (1988, 468) has no doubt 'That (Juana) defended herself to the last and refused to sign an abdication and nullification of her entire life,' the lighting and music in Bemberg's film only somewhat work to negate ideas of Juana's defiance.²⁹

When Juana is most abject, in the scenes of her confession and of the subsequent emptying of her cell, she is most 'sanctified' by the light to suggest the identification with God that Paz denies. The extremity of the close ups in the scene of Juana's confession render her framed by her wimple which works as a halo around her head. The chiaroscuro effect of the lighting whitens this halo to

²⁹ For Paz (1988, 463-468) there is '*Not a single declaration in which Sor Juana formally and expressly renounces letters.*' He underlines the importance of this statement with the use of italics. Finally, of the fact that at Juana's death there was haggling over ownership of her estate, Paz (1988, 468) asks, 'How can we interpret the evidence to the contrary except as a sign that some part of her remained unvanquished?'

an intense brightness and makes her (and with her dark eyes which are the only other items to catch the light on the two occasions when briefly she looks up and into the camera) 'enchanted' as an angel. Nevertheless, Bemberg renders Juana's identification with God ambiguous by the arched window of the last scene of the film - shot in her empty cell. This window, blank as it is, suggests the only source of diegetic light (in Figs.3.26 & 3.27), whilst the light itself forms a halo from which Juana's almost silhouetted figure is excluded. On the other hand, the 'heavenly' non-diegetic soprano voice which now sounds from another space and on which the image fades to the credits, reinforces and gives a final impression of beatitude. Furthermore, whilst at the film's end Félix Monti's clear light darkens, the ring on Juana's left hand, signifying her wedding to Christ, brightens:

Figs.3.26 & 3.27



30

It is arguable that in these ambiguities Bemberg somewhat canonises her heroine. If this is so, she not only inverts Paz' project to get to the truth of her, but weakens any feminist sense of her defiance. Nevertheless, in the context of this film's denunciations of the Church, her 'saintliness' can only mean Juana's vanquishment and suggests the Church's power indeed. Thus Emilie Bergmann's (1998, 229-247) criticism that *Yo, la peor de todas* is shaped by a narrative of female abjection is hardly the point. Furthermore, in her inflections of Paz' arguments here, Bemberg is making a feminist point. Bemberg's

³⁰ The light on the ring is somewhat lost in reproduction.

accusations of the Church are that it vanquishes Juana's intellect because of her gender, and not, as Paz would have it, because her intellect's findings (that the afterlife may be an abyss of nothingness) themselves were threatening.

Nevertheless, in that she does stress Juana's intellectual nature, analysis will now show how Bemberg offers more positive readings of her protagonist from a feminist point of view than critics have so far suggested.

ii. The Unremitting Nature of Juana's Intellectual Defiance

Through abstract film sets, hard lighting, yet free camera movement, Paz' 'woman, lucid and whole' (1988, 447), is reflected in the formal composition of the entire film. The abstract film sets are made much of in the film's publicity posters. In these, the vicereine is in period dress (advertising a historical costume drama), whilst she is placed against a geometric grey block and a cold, bright, artificially turquoise sky. The scene is taken from one in which she is reading one of Juana's poems:

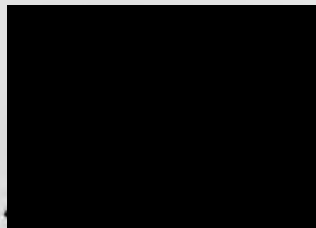


Fig.3.28 The blue of this scene (and poster) reinforces the colour scheme associated with Juana, at the same time that it contrasts the darker blue with which Juana is associated, as in:

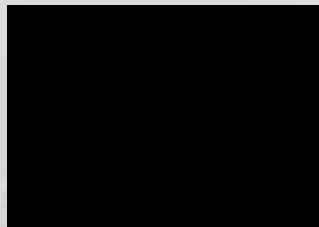


Fig.3.29 The quality of the film's light is faithful

to the terms of Paz's discussion of Juana's melancholy. He draws connections between Sor Juana's First Dream and Albrecht Dürer's Melancholy I (1514).³¹ Heinrich Wölfflin (1971, 201) points out that the term 'melancholic' had taken on ambiguous meaning by Dürer's time, meaning either 'sick,' or earnest, for the gift of intellectual work. Wölfflin's description of the tonal qualities of the etching (Fig.3.30), 'The light is not concentrated but broken-up; the main highlights are set very low,' have found their equivalence in Bemberg's film whose increasingly sombre palette inscribes an intellectual melancholy that is true to the darkening tones of Paz's book.³² Furthermore, there is apt coincidence between the objects in Sor Juana's cell, and those in Dürer's painting. Of them Paz (1998, 245) says,

This kind of collection is more closely related to the magician's cave than to the museum gallery ... The collection and the library were her family ... They were also her realm. A realm at once spatial and temporal, concrete and imaginary ... reduced to a series of random and miscellaneous objects.

Bemberg films thirteen sequences in Sor Juana's cell and is aware of the particular passage quoted above: 'Octavio Paz speaks of Sor Juana's cell as an enormous matrix and designed in the round - like the mind of Sor Juana, like the world' (in Trelles Plazaola 1991, 122).

³¹ They are both works that, spiritually, verge on infinity. Melancholy I is prophetic of Sor Juana's poem, 'in which the soul, lost in the geometric night and its prospects of obelisks and pyramids, looks on everything and sees nothing' (Paz 1988, 386).

³² Fig.3.30 is copied from Wölfflin (1971, 201).

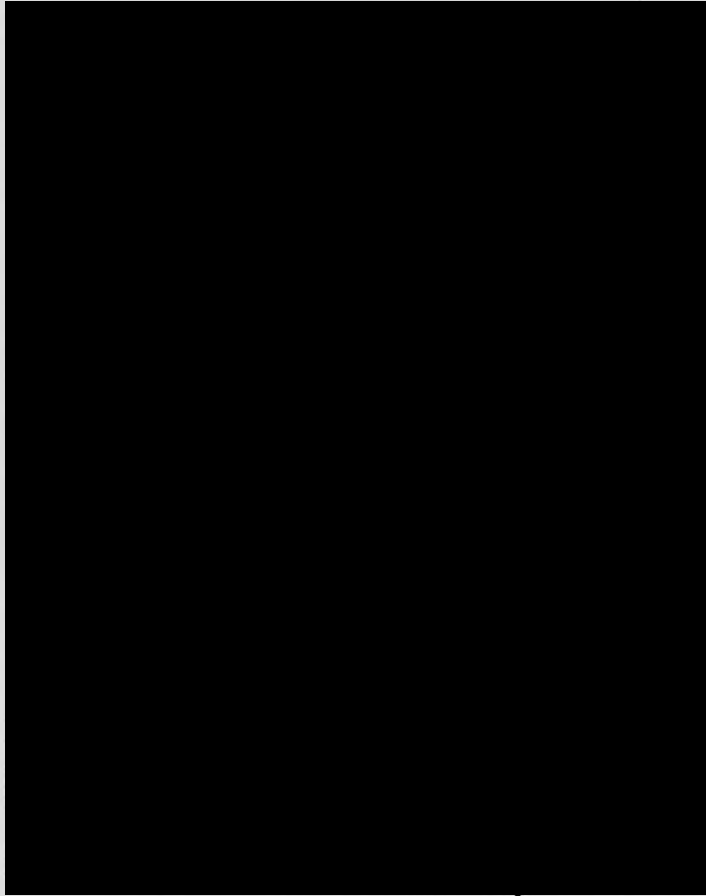
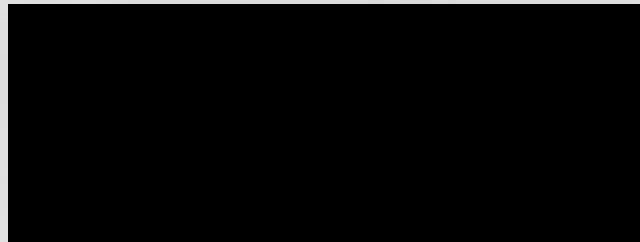
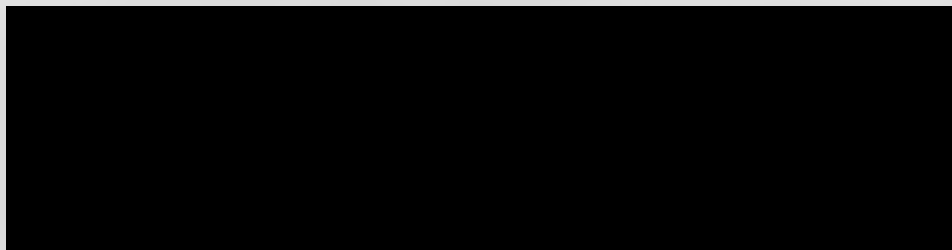


Fig.3.30: Albrecht Dürer's Melancholy I, 1514 (Engraving 239x168_{mm})

There is an early sequence in her cell which shows the 'fluidity' of Juana's mind. It is prefaced by a scene of her confessional, in which figures of priest and nun are lighted silhouettes in surrounding darkness. Juana says that she is only here (in the convent) according to her confessor's wishes, so that when we cut to the relief of the golden lights of her library, we understand that only in this 'secular world', where she is reading, is she free. The camera moves right with Juana, brushing past a blue curtain and into the living space of the cell from where have emanated the extra-diegetic sounds of (the vicereine playing) the strings of a harp. The camera now follows Juana (from Fig.3.31 to Fig.3.35) as she shows off her 'toys':

**Fig.3.31****Fig.3.32****Fig.3.33****Fig.3.34****Fig.3.35.**

Within the fluid frame is delineated an ensemble (astrolabe left, window upper-centre, harp right, and writing materials centre) similar to the array of objects in the cell of Dürer's melancholic (Fig.3.30), with its scales, upper-centre, window upper-right, and writing materials centre. The freedom of Juana's cell is

underlined by the vicereine's first words, 'I can't stand the bars of your audience room.' There are few cuts at this point, with instead a mobile frame produced by circular camera movements, thus expressing a world much larger and more fluid than - an opening out beyond - the confines of mere cell.

To Paz, it is this freedom of Juana's mind that threatens the Church.

Accordingly, there is an early sequence of four scenes that suggests that Juana's intellectual defiances are unrelenting. In the first scene Juana (as a young maid-in-waiting) undergoes a trial of her knowledge. In the next scene the vicereine listens to her husband reciting Juana's gift of a love poem to her. Thirdly, there is a cut to Sor Juana and all the nuns singing - this time with a grille in front of and separating them from the men of the Church. Finally, there is a brief scene in which Juana is composing a poem. Of interest here is the way in which light becomes symbolic of only Juana's intellectual nature.

The scene of Juana's 'trial' is played out in cross cuts between Juana, always in close-up, and various men, only sometimes in close-up. (Longer shots of the men accommodate more of them and so suggest the great numbers ranged against her.) Behind Juana is a lighted window with a grille of fine tracery. Apart from the light against Juana, it is a dark scene. One shot shows clearly how she is framed triply: by the screen, by the rows of men to either side of her, and placed against the window, she is framed as if in a column of light:

**Fig.3.36**

The symbolism of the lighting works to suggest that her mind has access to a wider world than that of the men. The next scene first shows a child's head framed against a dark curtain in the left side of the screen. Off-screen the vicereine's voice recites Juana's, 'You saw and touched/My broken heart within your hands'. The camera moves right and upwards until the vicereine's face is framed in the exact position that Juana occupied in the first scene (centred and close-up) with the horizontal sill of a lighted grilled window stretching beyond either side of her shoulders. The identification of the two women is made clear. The viceroy's voice (which now recites the final line of heartbreak) provides the sound edit to the cut to him. The window grille that frames him is darker. The camera then follows his movement towards the point of light (on the right-hand side of the screen) filtering through another grilled window, but he stops short within the darkness. When he comments, 'Still breaking hearts, María Luisa,' the camera cuts to a close up of the vicereine whose expression is sorrowful. Meanwhile, non-diegetic singing begins a sound edit to the next long shot of singing nuns behind a grille, whose shadows are thrown against the foreground of the frame. Light is shown above and below the nuns. Juana (the tallest) is to the back (and right) of the screen. She is smiling. The light catches her surplice. The singing carries over into a fifth and framing scene of this sequence in which it functions as background sound to the louder and ambient noise of a pen scratching. Juana is completing a poem. The singing is the thread that links the last three scenes

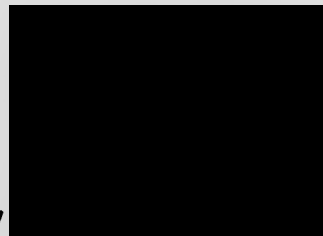
together and reinforces the lighting's suggestion of Juana's intellectual freedom, despite the presence of the grille.

In Bemberg's autobiographical films the motifs of grille and window mark the boundary between domestic (feminine) and active (masculine) spaces. The entrapment and possibility of which they speak is primarily sexual. In Yo, la peor de todas the window has become symbol of the light of woman's intellect. Particularly, the sequence of scenes analysed above reinforces the idea that the window represents light for women and not for men. Although Juana's poems to the vicereine are passionate, it is only the world of ideas that matters to her.³³ Thus Juana does not see the bars. On the contrary, as we have seen, it is the vicereine who feels trapped by them, for she does not have creative outlet.

iii. The Sexual Defiance?

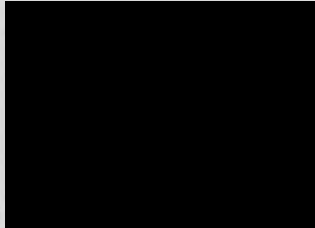
When we first see Juana and the vicereine alone the cross cutting between their close-up images suggests reflections of each other. The reflections reinforce the contrasts in their costumes, however, which work with lighting to suggest the vicereine's sexuality, not the nun's. The cross cutting highlights the contrast of the feather in the vicereine's cap against the enclosing habit of Sor Juana. The darker blue, grey and white tones, both of Juana's habit and the background that

frames her (a dark grey wall of her cell), Fig.3.37



³³ Bemberg says, 'Love is not the core of Juana's life; for her what matters is the world of ideas' (in Burton-Carvajal 1997, 81).

contrast with the lighter golden tones of the close ups of the vicereine, whose background of grey is alleviated by a bright orange mantilla (thrown over the back of the chair in which she sits) and which dominates at least one quarter of



the frame: **Fig.3.38**

The vicereine's bright orange suggests a sexuality which works against the dark brightness of Juana's blue and white, thereby underlining the latter's contrasting spirituality. At the same time a slightly more sensual, less crisp light is thrown onto the vicereine, which echoes that in other (more lighthearted) scenes of the women together:

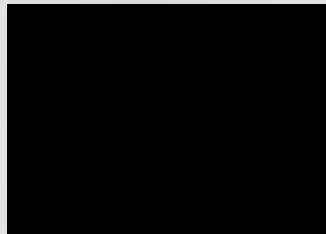


Fig.3.39

Bemberg claimed that she eschewed erotic scenes because firstly, she 'didn't believe it' and secondly, because they would have added an artificial note: 'The love sonnets that Juana dedicated to the vicereine (indicate) an ambiguous relationship, but I respect Juana too much to introduce erotic scenes into her cell ... This I do believe: that there was between them a tender complicity' (Revista Somos, Buenos Aires, 8 August 1990).³⁴ Is it true, however, that Bemberg has

³⁴ Paz does not dispute that Sor Juana may have been in love with the vicereine but he consistently argues that the evidence is inconclusive, and that expressed as it is in the poems Sor Juana addressed to the vicereine, such a love would not have been understood as rebellious at the time; she was writing according to the mores of the courtly love tradition, where the beloved was always female and unavailable.

avoided (as she suggests) the erotic connection (thus the erotic transgression) between the nun and vicereine? Bruce Williams (2002, 137) argues a reading against the grain of Bemberg's own disavowals of lesbian desire in the film, saying that 'lesbian desire is indeed present.' He argues that if there was no vocabulary for lesbianism in seventeenth-century Mexico, it does not mean that it was not there, any more than it does not mean that it is not there in Bemberg's film, because she disavowed it. Nevertheless, Bergmann et al (1990, 151-172) criticise Bemberg for failing to show a more erotic relationship between the two women. The first chapter of this thesis suggested that academic concentration on Bemberg's supposed support of Paz' denial of Juana's lesbian desire closes down all speculation as to the wide-ranging forms of desire between women that this film (and Bemberg's other films) may express.³⁵ Whilst Chapter Six will explore these forms of desire further, this chapter is interested in the lesbian debate in so far as it is involved with Bemberg's treatment of Paz' argument concerning Juana's intellectual transgression. We must ask how questions of intellect and questions of gender (and sexuality) are integrated in the film, and how they do or do not depart from Paz' contentions.³⁶

Certainly, Juana's more cerebral nature is evident in the famous scene when the vicereine kisses her. The 'love' scene takes place about an hour into the film. Little is spoken with much suggested on an erotic level. The orchestration of the look within the diegesis is telling. Each character is afforded two point-of-view

³⁵ This familiar feminist criticism that 'buddy' films featuring women work hard to suppress suggestions of lesbianism, is exemplified in Lucy Fischer's discussions (1989, 216-249) of *Girlfriends* (Claudia Weill, USA, 1978) and *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, USA, 1991).

³⁶ Bemberg says, 'Paz' book concentrates on Juana's struggle with the Church. But I wanted to tell the story of the church's misogynistic discriminations of all kinds, for example, the fact that women cannot be priests even though it is they that fill the churches' (in Burton-Carvajal 1997, 80).

shots of the other, which, however, are not equally weighted in either duration or content. Both of the vicereine's and only one of Juana's point-of-view shots are protracted. Furthermore, Juana's look at the vicereine is almost erased for the spectator whose position is aligned with the vicereine's words: She wonders, she says, what Juana looks like when alone. In the wake and with the weight of this in the spectator imagination, the camera cuts to a close up of Juana and remains poised there in the longest point-of-view take of the scene. The nun moves to the right of the frame, enabling the vicereine to move into the left behind her. The rest of the take is a two shot in which the vicereine dominates. The power of her command, 'Take off your veil' is reinforced by her position behind and slightly above Juana. To Juana's hesitation she adds, 'It's an order.' Juana, face averted, slowly complies, removing the first layer of her veil. Neither looks back at the other, Juana is being looked at by the vicereine, whilst the spectator is watching the vicereine gaze at Juana. When Juana further hesitates she is instructed to take off all her veil. There has still been no cutting when the vicereine turns her around by the shoulders saying, 'This Juana is mine - only mine.' She cups Juana's face in her hands, and gives her a brief, chaste kiss on the lips. Afterwards the vicereine gazes in silence at Juana, finally saying, 'To remember.' These words are a cue taken from an earlier scene in which the younger Juana, as lady-in-waiting, has coquettishly kissed a courtier. They thus intimate that Juana has already shared her life history with the vicereine, and also underline that the keynote of this scene is strangely opposed to the one to which it refers: this is not flirtation, but erotically-charged love. Furthermore, the close ups here put the spectator in an unusually intimate

relation with their love.³⁷ Nevertheless, that the vicereine controls the action and dominates the frame suggests that it is of more importance to her than to Juana. The gaze (and kiss) between Juana and the vicereine is not between, but at. Thus the spectator does not share in 'equivalence,' but in the power, of a look. Nevertheless, because for the nun, love is a part of that knowledge that the Church disallowed her, but is subjugated to it (Juana keeps the vicereine's medallion in her books), it is possible to argue that Bemberg has done for a woman artist what Griselda Pollock (1998, 33) discussing Agnès Merlet's Artemisia (France, 1998) despairs of finding in a 'biopic' of a woman artist.³⁸

A comparison of Bemberg's and Merlet's films highlights the former's feminism.³⁹ Whilst not denying Juana's sexual nature, Bemberg has celebrated Juana's intellectual nature over it. Merlet, on the other hand, so foregrounds her heroine's sexuality, that the sense of her intellectual endeavour is eclipsed. Immediate impressions suggest that Yo, la peor de todas is more austere and displays more starkly the intellect of Bemberg's protagonist.⁴⁰ The more sensual nature of Artemisia (aided in her presentation as an adolescent) is suggested in

³⁷ Costume dramas tend to 'rely on set-ups that maximize (their) qualities of spectacle - high angles, mid-long shots' so that the spectator is placed 'in an Olympian and curiously touristic position' (Chris Darke 1995 b, 172).

³⁸ Pollock (1998, 33) says, 'The conflation of an artist's biography and works of art functions very differently depending on whether the artist is a man or a woman. His art appears to give us access to the mystery of genius; hers merely confirms the pathology of the feminine, saturated by her sex, of which she becomes both emblem and symptom.'

³⁹ Merlet's film narrates the adolescence and young adulthood of Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652/3). It follows her apprenticeship in her father's studio, and subsequently in that of Agostino Tassi. It covers her rape by Tassi and his subsequent trial. Artemisia takes Tassi's part, so is estranged from her father who had had him arraigned. At the trial, conducted by men, Artemisia's own studies of male genitalia accuse her. As punishment, Artemisia's hands are violated. Thus Artemisia - like Juana - is 'tried' by men for daring to tread into their intellectual preserve. The two women are similarly brutally punished. Finally, it is with what they work - Juana with her spirit and Artemisia with her hands - that they are damaged. Juana herself is so spiritually crushed that we see her mutilate her hand with her own glasses. The films have opposed formal treatments, however, and emphasise their narratives differently.

⁴⁰ Whilst it could be argued that the starkness is result of depicting a nun in a convent, Artemisia is an intellectual too and Juana was - as we have seen - noted for her flirtatiousness.

the real external locations across which the camera sweeps unrestrainedly. Juana's story (apart from moments of freedom in her cell) is often described with a more static camera, and whilst its colours may be brighter, they express a tighter range and are described against darker backgrounds. Furthermore, the point at which each filmmaker begins her heroine's story means the description of opposed narrative trajectories. Yo, la peor de todas begins with Juana's fame established. Artemisia's intellect is about to flower. Her story describes progression where Juana's describes a downfall. Furthermore, Artemisia's search for knowledge is 'confused' with her search for sexual knowledge, so that in this film (controversially for Pollock), woman's sexual and intellectual fulfillment are of equal value. This is spelled out in the sequencing of scenes after Artemisia has visited Tassi in jail and declared her love for him. Next is a dissolve into Artemisia's new studio - constructed along the lines of Tassi's outside studio. She is painting scenes of copulation and blood. Then she breaks into Tassi's studio, from within which we see her suddenly framed in a window of light, like Sor Juana in her cell. Thus for Merlet (who is not a feminist), Artemisia's choice of lover, her choice of mentor and the subject matter of her art are interconnected. Bemberg's choices are more 'feminist.' She does not show Juana dependent on men for initial learning, and the above analysis has demonstrated how her heroine's search is exclusively for knowledge (to which an ambiguously sexual love - as a part of that - is subjugated).

A comparison of the films' endings also highlights Bemberg's feminism in that she depicts Juana's despair as originating in the denial of her intellect. The framing of Juana's confession is made complete by the final sequence in her

cell. The shelves no longer have books on them, and the camera pans around the entire cell, showing its new emptiness. It finally moves across the study table, bare but for crucifix and candle, to the disconsolate figure in long shot of Sor Juana, alone with her dreams (Figs.3.26 & 3.27). Behind her the window is now blank, and devoid of stars. Without her books and instruments she has no way of seeing them. The nun's credits read in sober white against a black background: 'Sor Juana died shortly after of the plague. She is now considered one of the greatest poets of Spain's Golden Age.' The accompanying strings in a minor key express great sadness. On the other hand, Artemisia's end credits (in handwriting) are against a backdrop of her paintings and accompanied by a melancholic but lighter music than Bemberg's: 'Artemisia never saw Agostino again. She next met her father ten years later in England. Artemisia Gentileschi is now considered the first woman painter in the history of art.'⁴¹ These credits move up the screen and out of sight much faster than do Bemberg's, which (disappearing by cut rather than by their own movement) suggest stillness and gravity. Merlet's film is hopeful in that Artemisia will continue to produce, and ever-greater work.⁴² Artemisia's narrative ends with her looking through a grille that provides her artist's perspective. It is her window onto the world that she will translate onto the canvas that is next to her. The last image of the film shows her framed within the light of this grille, whereas we have seen Juana left against a semi-darkened window in a film that ends with her despair.

⁴¹ Pollock (1998, 36) points out that the final are credits misleading. Artemisia was not the first woman artist in art history.

⁴² I argue that the film is hopeful in spite of Pollock's criticisms (another of which is that the film fails to suggest that Artemisia went on to mother several women artists).

B. Yo, la peor de todas' Use of Genre

How, then, has Bemberg used genre in Yo, la peor de todas to reinforce its protagonist's resistance? Although Bemberg's accusations of the Catholic Church are part of her feminist agenda, she supports Paz' assertions of Juana's cerebral rather than sensual nature. If melodrama mourned Argentina, this stylized film underscores the intellect's abstractions through the use of film sets rather than location. The resultant austerity and artifice (to which we have seen Juana herself - in displaying her artefacts in her cell - draw attention) somewhat atone the more angelic Juana than Paz allows. Furthermore, by drawing attention to its own constructedness, the film answers those critics that accuse historical costume dramas of giving only one version of the past. Furthermore, as with Camila, by darkening her palette (and towards the film's end, introducing scenes of blood and vomit into her studio), Bemberg is not romanticising the past. Finally, against Juana's austerity stands out the relative sensuality of other characters and the sumptuousness of their costumes, especially of the vicereine. The vicereine has been the bearer of costume's seductions. Thus Yo, la peor de todas accords with the feminist celebration of heritage films in that it suggests (women's) sexual truths, at the same time that it counters the dominant aesthetic suggestions of most heritage films by suggesting that for some women the sexual should be subservient to the intellectual truth. In this respect Bemberg challenges a paradox of feminist film criticism that whilst it complains of women's reduction to the sexual, much of its critical writing, in trying to redefine women's sexual positioning, does it too. Yo, la peor de todas, far from denying Juana's sexual nature, demonstrates the dangers of reducing all analysis to the sexual.

Conclusion

In her reconstructions of history, Bemberg uses and departs from mainstream and feminist practices in both the historical/heritage costume drama and the melodrama. How has Bemberg used and departed from the historical costume drama? Each historical costume drama has its distinct look. Camila is opulent, filmed on location and - at its beginning - through a softening pink lens. Yo, la peor de todas is also opulent but because to get to the heart of Sor Juana is to get to the abstract workings of the intellect, Bemberg uses abstract film sets and a hard rather than soft lighting. Through such lavish aesthetics Bemberg makes her challenges to 'straight' history excessive. I would therefore rephrase Pam Cook (1996, 77) to argue that it is not '*apart* from their foregrounding of history as masquerade' (my italics) that 'what the costume romances appear to achieve is the feminisation of history itself,' but *through* its foregrounding. It is in such 'feminisation' as well as in its more serious intent, that Bemberg's use of costume is to be distinguished in its subversions of history from the knowing (but sexist) irreverence of (for example) the Carrv On films. Furthermore, Yo, la peor de todas as a stylised film draws attention to its own constructedness, and hence is 'knowing' in its opposition to the idea of 'true story.' (This knowingness is to be found also in the jokes concerning melodrama in Camila.) In this sense Bemberg's costume dramas are more 'knowing' in the sense of European heritage films made from the late 1970s onwards.⁴³ Finally, Bemberg's costume dramas are opulent but deflect their seductions away from the protagonist. All these uses put Bemberg in some degree of opposition to dominant uses of the genre.

⁴³ Ginette Vincendeau (2001, xviii) says that these films 'can only be highly aware of retracing earlier grounds,' and 'in this sense are automatically mannerist.'

How has Bemberg used and departed from melodrama? Bemberg uses melodrama to work with the costume drama's contestation of history: that the private world has other truths by which to contest those of the public one.⁴⁴ Bemberg more than reasserts the feminine, as in 'The Woman's Film.' She subverts the entire meaning of the family melodrama's historic project, by giving the narrative momentum to women. Her female protagonist speaks (her desire) as well as acts. The recourse to melodrama also reinforces the costume drama's deflection of the voyeuristic gaze, for as Laura Mulvey (1977, 54) states, 'When a female protagonist is at the centre of the melodramatic narrative, the male spectatorial position is disturbed.' Finally, in crossing the historical costume drama with melodrama Bemberg has celebrated a woman's sexual agency at the same time that she has mourned her oppression. Her patriarchal oppressor is accused at the same time that as a man he is desired. Thus Camila's desire states a challenge to the future.

Bemberg's historical protagonists and films challenge the Catholic Church and its powers (not least over herself). Although both historical women were crushed by the patriarchal powers of the state because they did not remain silent, Bemberg presents them as thinking women, who remain defiant in the expression of their desires, both sexual and intellectual. Bemberg's historical films revive crushed women and reinscribe their defiance into Argentina's present.⁴⁵ Thus their representation shows them subverting their received

⁴⁴ 'The persistence of the melodrama might indicate the ways in which popular culture has ... resolutely refused to understand social change in other than private contexts and emotional terms' (Gledhill 1991, 208).

⁴⁵ Bemberg's co-productions, beginning with Camila, thus go counter to B. Ruby Rich's assertion (1991, 188) that international co-productions are in danger of removing 'political specificity' and promote 'a traditional, essentially conservative form of authorship.'

'story.' Nevertheless, Bemberg's subversion of story finds its most extreme expression in her final film. At this end point of her protagonist's narrative trajectory, Bemberg moves from a serious presentation of historical women to a more comic and 'fantastic' display. This Chapter Four will now consider.

CHAPTER FOUR

Marvel: *De eso no se habla*, Politics and 'Magical Realism.'

Introduction

De eso no se habla, Bemberg's final film and costume drama, is different from the preceding five films in a striking way: the protagonist, Charlotte (Alejandra Podesta), is about three feet tall. Furthermore, halfway through the film, the controlling subjectivity of Charlotte's mother, Doña Leonor (Luisina Brando), is handed over to Ludovico d'Andrea (Marcello Mastroianni), a male protagonist. This is when he falls in love with Charlotte and the film's ensuing narrative traces his quest for her. The film is also different from Bemberg's other films in that intermittently it employs a disorientating use of colour and haunting music. Finally, the film is Bemberg's most lighthearted and playful. All of these 'anomalies' within the Bemberg oeuvre call for aesthetic definition and for a discussion of narrative mode.

The narrative begins with Charlotte's second birthday party. Doña Leonor has realized (but strives to deny) that her daughter is a dwarf. Doña Leonor's first act of her refusal to talk of Charlotte's small stature is when (comically, bizarrely and grotesquely), in the middle of the night, she knocks down the ornamental dwarves in Widow Schmidt's garden with a pickaxe. Then she buries them. In the first direct allusion (by Padre Aurelio, the priest), to her daughter's stature, Doña Leonor says, 'We don't talk about that.' Charlotte

grows up. The narrative proceeds with Doña Leonor's attempts to manipulate Charlotte's public persona. She votes Charlotte into a piano recital and asks d'Andrea to purchase Charlotte a large white horse. The vision of Charlotte on this horse causes d'Andrea to fall in love with her. Now (as he seeks to marry her) he directs the narrative. (Intermittently, for example in the wedding preparations, the narrative is taken over by Doña Leonor again.) After the wedding, the aspirations of both Doña Leonor and d'Andrea (for social respectability and for love, respectively) are achieved. But both Doña Leonor's and d'Andrea's subjectivities have directed the film's points of view and effected the suppression of Charlotte's visions. Thus what Charlotte has to challenge throughout the film is her silencing. It is only in the last few minutes of the film, that Charlotte irrevocably reverses their visions. 'Happily-ever-after' married to d'Andrea, and a few years after their marriage, Charlotte, now Mayoress, enacts a decision: She leaves d'Andrea to join (symbolically) the circus.

The circus is analogous to Bakhtin's carnival, which 'is hostile to any sort of conclusive conclusion: all endings are merely new beginnings; carnival images are reborn again and again' (from Bakhtin's Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, quoted in Gardiner 1993, 243). The new beginning (for Charlotte) is, of course, feminist. Thus, although after finishing Yo la peor de todas, Bemberg said, 'My debt to feminism is now paid and I'm going to make (a) comedy' (in Revista Semanario, Buenos Aires, 25 May 1993), the film's feminism is clear. Nevertheless, the feminism is mediated in strange and 'fantastic' ways. Although the film's aesthetics and politics embrace aspects of the modes of

fantasy, surrealism and fable, it is this chapter's contentions that through Doña Leonor's repressions, d'Andrea's love and Charlotte's resistance, *De eso no se habla* uses a predominantly 'magical-realist' aesthetic (in its strange and disorientating register of colour and sound) to celebrate the theme of Charlotte's 'feminist carnivalesque'. In order to argue so, it will place its analysis of four sequences (two of Charlotte, and one each of Doña Leonor and d'Andrea) within a broad discussion of the film's politics and aesthetics.

That the film's aesthetic is disorientating and its narrative mode is 'fantastic' in a wide sense, are immediately indicated. The credits - which end on, 'This tale is dedicated to everyone who has the courage to be different' - are in simple roman script. In their starkness of white on black they convey a sense of gravity against which the quiet laughter of a child has the counter effect of levity. Secondly, into the first scene (of Doña Leonor looking at herself in a three-way mirror) is interjected the first mellifluous accents of a deep and quiet male voice-over. It says, 'Many years have passed. Debates about the origin of events still occupy idle minds in San José de los Altares. (Two seconds pause.) All I can say is, it started one moonlit night in front of a mirror.' This voice-over places us nowhere ('San José de los Altares' sounds like any small colonial town) and in no time.¹ 'Many years have passed' is as unspecific as the 'Once upon a time' of a fairy tale.² The person telling the tale invests it with the immediacy of

¹ This is in despite of the fact that - as Chapter Seven will show - details of the opening shot suggest 1930s' upper-middle-class Argentina.

² Psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim (1976) discriminates the fairy tale's from the fable's mode of address to the child's developing psyche: Fable is moralistic and sometimes pessimistic, whereas fairy tale 'never suggests, demands or tells' and thereby appeals more to the imagination (Ibid, 111). Furthermore, fairy tale - from which children, according to their stage of development, extract and identify only with what they need - has a richer psychological truth than does fable (Ibid, 76) and beckons 'the way to a better future' (Ibid, 111). Thus fairy tale is about growth and about going out into the world. Bemberg's tale has qualities (according to Bettelheim's

a first-person witness, yet remains a mystery. Then (when Dofia Leonor departs from her house at the scene's end) the street is bathed in a bright but brooding blue light - deep (not cold, like the blue wash of Miss Mary) - that situates us in a world that borders on the unreal:



Fig.4.1 The mystery of the narrator is continued in the rest of the film where although his omniscient voice-over assumes authority, it resists interpretation or judgement. Thus the nameless narration (as opposed to 'autographed literature') reinforces the opening scene's suggestions of folktale. Furthermore, the mystery narrator is Bakhtin's preferred voice for carnival, and so anticipates the film's carnivalesque conclusions.³

1. Charlotte Holds the Camera

This chapter's analysis of De eso no se habla begins with Charlotte, and the film's ending. The last five minutes of the film (as Charlotte enters the circus grounds) are filmed from her point of view and are her claim to her 'different' self-expression. It is early morning. Birds are singing. The screen appears to shake as various constituents of a circus ground (parked car, trailers, circus top, elephant, and lion in his cage) come into view. There is no cutting until in confirmation to fellow dwarves that her world is 'Bene, benissimo,' we see

definition of them) of both fable and fairy tale. It is more fable than fairy tale in that it is not concerned with rich psychological truths, and it is not optimistic in an unqualified way. However, like fairy tale, it argues the possibility of change - and here and now on this earth, in Argentina.

Charlotte (in the camera's angle down towards her) looking upwards and smiling. The circus intimates a threat of the 'other' or 'outside' coming in.⁴ Confined within the graveyard where she is tending her husband's grave, Doña Leonor twice hears the circus' entrance from beyond the horizon with fear. It threatens to revivify the ossified forms of propriety by which she, and the pueblo, are bound. Furthermore, Doña Leonor instinctively recognises that the circus will speak Charlotte's language. She tries to wave the gypsies away. Although Charlotte has attempted resistance before (such as acting as Carmen, and taking a bow against her mother's proscriptions at the piano recital), her final, and ultimate act of resistance is to join the gypsies and to make the film start anew when we thought it was over.

Charlotte's visit to the circus is prefaced by our final (valedictory) look at the male protagonist in a mid-close-up shot of his pained face in muted blue colours. He has just released Charlotte's horse in a gesture that he relinquishes Charlotte too. The last time we see d'Andrea, he is not looking straight towards the camera but obliquely outwards at emptiness, before closing his eyes:



Fig.4.2 The desolation of this image is underlined by the ambient sound of rain. Whilst the cut into Charlotte's scene continues the

³ In his appraisal of Dostoevsky's poetics, Bakhtin cites a carnivalesque mystery of space and time, in which a stranger fulfils his function in dialogue outside of plot and of his specificity within that plot (in Shepherd 1993, 3-12).

⁴ In Argentina, the gaucho figure of Juan María Gutiérrez' *Juan Moreira* (1991, originally 1879) comes from the pampas to figure in the carnival - the main popular celebration in the streets of Buenos Aires at the turn of the century - but returns to them.

muted blue colours (suggesting sympathy between Charlotte and d'Andrea), the sudden sound of birds connotes those colours as those of dawn. As the scene progresses its palette gradually lightens, whilst the diegetic sound of dawn chorus continues. The dawning of light functions as a new subjectivity and as its revelation, whilst the scene's one long take (apart from the final cut) suggests that Charlotte's is spontaneous and unimpeded vision. The sense of wonder is evident. The camera moves across an image of a wagon and then moves back to examine it again before it moves into its interior. The first close-up image of an unmoving circus top is rendered shaky and as soon as the camera moves (at first to the right), it is clear that the visual direction is in new hands. This is not the world of the invisible but audible and ordering narrator. The camera continues moving from side to side, mostly projected upwards, sometimes jerkily, sometimes smoothly, and at different speeds. It first holds still on two women washing their hair in a trailer. Here the *mise-en-scène* (of tattered orange curtains half-up and behind the women and - as the camera pulls back - of washing hanging on a line outside),

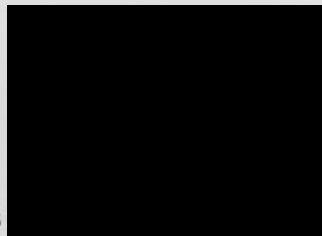
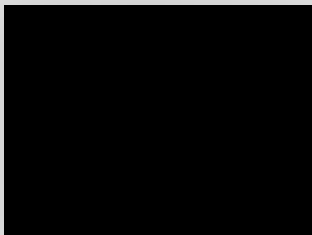


Fig.4.3 is of a new kind. The film's suggestions of wealth and claustrophobia have been replaced by poverty and an attendant sense of abandonment. Even the way in which the woman closest to the camera is towelling her hair (holding her head upside down and shaking it) suggests a liberated sensuality.

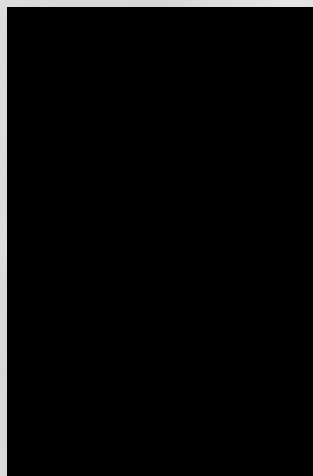
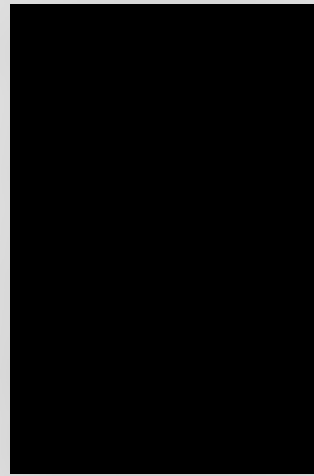
In the rest of the film, the sound pattern (we will see) has established first Doña Leonor's and then d'Andrea's subjectivities. Now there is a new arrangement of non-diegetic sound. At first the ambient sound of footsteps accompanying the camera are audible but muted. The camera has hesitated before moving into the first house. As it does so (assuming a confidence of articulation), a solitary pipe plays, followed by a drumbeat on the image of the women. The pattern is repeated (after a dwarf carrying a plank has waved at the camera), but now (as the camera approaches the elephant), exotic jungle birds augment the sound. Thus the pattern suggests a sense of building, and of expectation. This sense of something momentous climaxes as - as we look into the elephant's eyes - the pattern is repeated once more (but much louder) and concluded. The solitary pipe continues and only finishes its theme when the lion looks round and into the camera. Thus it is only once Charlotte's subjectivity is confirmed (by music, by wave and by reciprocated looks of both elephant and of lion) that we hear (this time unmistakably) the ambient sounds of her footsteps, suggesting that the camera has indeed become her eye. Now (only) come the diegetic sounds of dialogue. In the sole conversation, the camera (following Charlotte's look),



Fig.4.5

Pointedly, Charlotte concludes this

exchange in a new language - Italian - although she was given in the question the choice of Spanish too. The initial hesitancy of both image and sound have worked together as a sign of a new consciousness behind the camera whose incipient autonomy increases in confidence only as the scene proceeds. This is evident in the dance (Figs.4.6 to 4.9) between camera and elephant, as the latter turns around from, before towards, the former's circular movements (Figs.4.7 & 4.8, respectively) that eventually insist on (in Fig.4.9) intimacy:

Fig.4.6**Fig.4.7****Fig.4.8****Fig.4.9**

The camera's angle upwards exaggerates the question of relative height. The elephant looks straight at the camera; small and large have recognized each other. That theirs is a community defined by size is underlined in the odd framing of perspective throughout this scene. It is present in the image of the dwarf (Fig.4.10) who carries the plank obliquely into and across the frame, and

in the dismantlement of the circus frame (Figs.4.11 & 4.12) as it is lowered to the ground from a higher to a lower level than the camera:

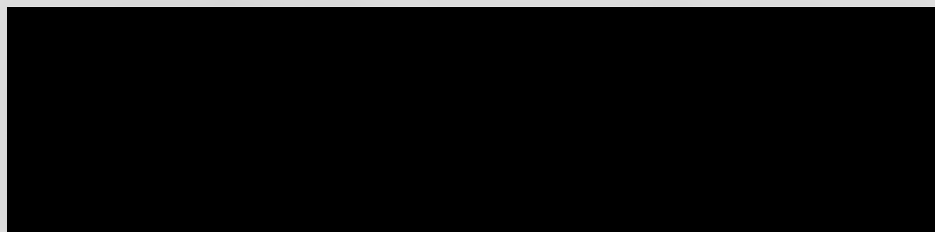


Fig.4.10

Fig.4.11

Fig.4.12

The camera angle remains at an upward one however, distorting even further the movement, actions and play with perspective.

The scene ends on Charlotte's 'Benissimo' with a cut to a tracking shot of a circus cavalcade, and to the sound of circus music, before another cut to the close up of Charlotte resplendent in glittering fez:

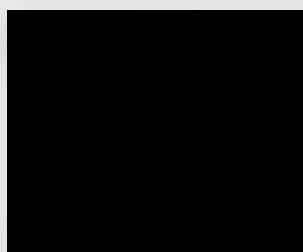
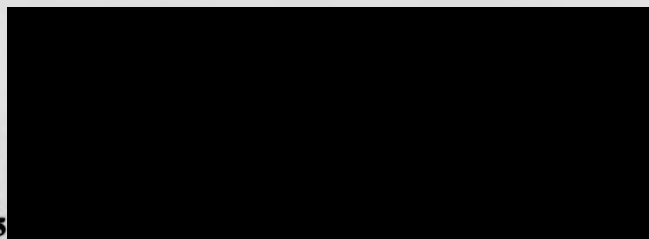


Fig.4.13

The camera pulls back and tracks

Mohamé's following footsteps (Fig.4.14), coming to rest as he does (Fig.4.15),

so that Charlotte on her white horse can move out of the frame to her new life:



Figs.4.14 & 4.15

The next close up is of Doña Leonor shut behind the grille of her house,

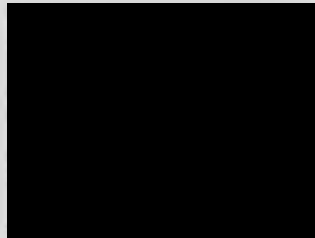


Fig.4.16 and is graphic echo of Charlotte's
(earlier) film of the lion behind his bars:

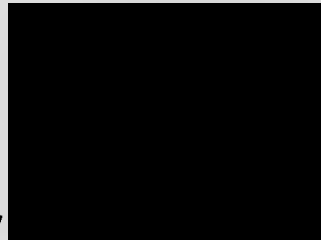
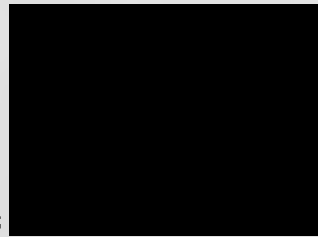


Fig.4.17 Whilst the lion is potential fellow to
Charlotte, in his regal but trapped magnificence he is sign of Doña Leonor's
wasting. The film's penultimate images oppose Mohamé's extreme long-shot
view of the cavalcade (and Charlotte within it) disappearing over the ever-



unfolding horizon, **Fig.4.18** to the image
(Fig.4.16) of Doña Leonor shut away 'for ever.' Thus Charlotte has resisted her
mother's tyrannies at the same time that sadness tinges the hopeful ending.
Nevertheless, Bemberg has a woman forging her own identity in riding out at
dawn.⁵

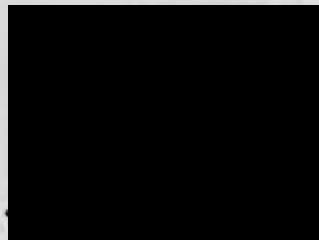
⁵ In more than one way this ending subverts the thrust of *Don Segundo Sombra*'s ride into the sunset (Ricardo Güiraldes 1995, originally 1926). The real protagonist of the film, the daughter, leaves the mother and community to develop without her, whereas in Güiraldes' tale, Don Segundo Sombra leaves the (boy) protagonist and the community - as in *Shane* (George Stevens, USA, 1953) - to develop without him.

The film's final long, sidewise and tracking shot of the cavalcade approaching the horizon eschews all the film's claustrophobia with a widening perspective, and suggests Charlotte's endlessly-unfolding prospect of freedom within a circus that for her is Bakhtin's 'space of life and of liberty.' Although her 'camerawork' laments that Charlotte has never been given her own voice, 'de eso no se habla,' nor been allowed her own way of seeing, it suggests - inscribed by the use of home video camera - carnival's communal and creative access to art. (Its blue wash also confirms the film's more hopeful visions, which will be discussed below.)

2. Doña Leonor: A Repressive Feminine Subjectivity

The political point that Bemberg is making of Charlotte's freedom and of Doña Leonor's wasting is that the mother has suppressed her child's difference. Chapter Five will analyse how Doña Leonor's repressions of Charlotte are mirrored (and effected) through her control of the film's point of view. Analysis of selected shots of the opening sequence (beginning and ending in Doña Leonor's bedroom) will in this chapter show how the film immediately establishes Doña Leonor's repressive subjectivity. This sequence itself narrates Doña Leonor's displeasure at the whispered rumours concerning Charlotte to whose birthday party we cut back and forth from Doña Leonor's gaze at herself in a three-way mirror. At that party one other mother has tried to comfort her but was rejected. For this Doña Leonor earns the curse that God will punish her again.

The first shot shows Doña Leonor reflected three times as the voice-over



sorrowfully intones, **Fig.4.19** Whilst the subdued effect of heavy furniture and muted lighting underlines Doña Leonor's sorrowful expression, the somber tone is immediately obliterated with a cut to the bright colours and festive sounds of a party. Four women (two of whom are looking directly out at the camera) are lined up towards the spectator:

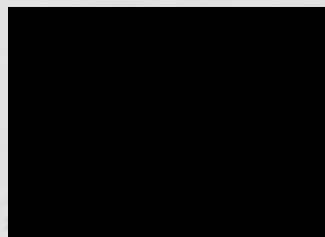


Fig.4.20 The next cut is to their eyeline view (across the children's heads) of a close up of a cake. The camera moves upwards to bring into frame mother and child:

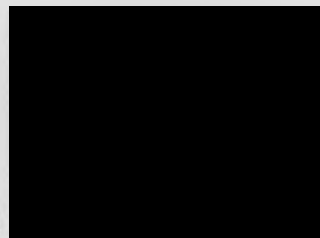
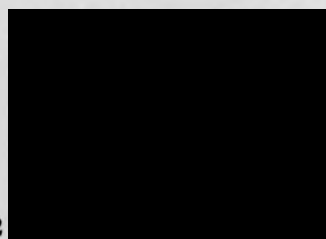


Fig.4.21 Therefore as Doña Leonor herself looks



around, **Fig.4.22** and afterwards straight outwards, she is likewise sizing up the women, but especially the four ranged

opposite her. From her point of view we cut to the fourth shot - a pan over all four women - suggesting Doña Leonor's individual scrutiny of them. The true object of her disdain is the woman in pink on whom (with her gossiping neighbour) the camera comes to rest:

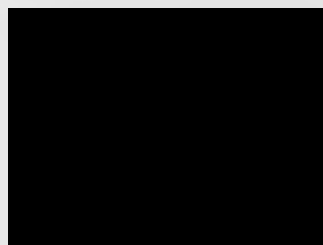
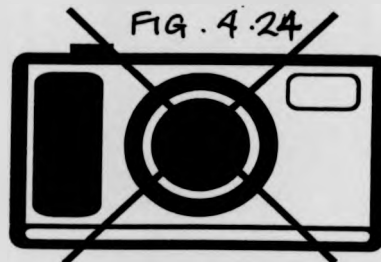


Fig.4.23.

We are sizing up her 'ridiculous' hat in Doña Leonor's spirit.

The cutting back and forth across bright and subdued light suggests a contrasting or dual tone of tale. There is a sense of humour that complicates the sadness of all shots back to the bedroom. At the same time, the comic tone is tempered by the voice-over, and music in a minor key, that suggest sadness. The voice-over (from another time and space) is key to the scene's suggestions of a melancholic subjectivity that, intricately linked to memory, is controlling the film's visions. Appropriately, sadness predominates and closes the scene. In the final shot we return to the chiaroscuro darkness of her bedroom in which the edges of Doña Leonor's body are picked out by the apparently diegetic light (from the left and above) of a lamp. The effect increases the sense of darkness enveloping her, but works now with the continuation of the (non-diegetic) curse to complete a sense of her social isolation. This curse both works with the voice-over to reinforce the sense of other times and spaces, and completes the narrative connection between the two scenes of party and bedroom: Doña Leonor's unhappiness

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'OF THE MALVINAS WE DO NOT TALK'

proceeds from a private sense of public humiliation. Her sadness is bound up with her social pride.

In this scene, the somber lighting has reinforced ideas of claustrophobic private spaces and the self-immolation of Doña Leonor. The brighter light belongs to the playful world of children (if also to the world of their gossiping mothers) to which Doña Leonor is placed in opposition. This repressive (albeit complex) subjectivity (that Charlotte must resist) is continued in the film until the point at which d'Andrea's subjectivity takes over.

3. The Film's Politics.

Doña Leonor's repressive subjectivity can be read politically. In Argentina it was immediately recognized that the film was open to political reading. Clarín (Buenos Aires, 26 May 1993) welcomed the film's release with a cartoon of two people talking (Fig.4.24). One of them declares that 'Bemberg has made a film about the British ambassador who says that there will be no dialogue over the Malvinas until 2001.' The other person asks the name of the film. The reply is 'De eso no se habla.' The politics which Bemberg's film speaks is, however, a resistance to tyranny. Bemberg herself equates the mother with a Latin American dictator.⁶ Thus analogized, 'that' which the mother censors is not just Charlotte but comes to mean anybody 'different' to whom the film is dedicated. Doña Leonor speaks and enacts the silencing inherent in the film's title: 'We don't want to talk about it' is not an accurate translation of 'De eso no se habla,' which (as used in the vernacular) does not read either as a wish or as a request,

⁶ In 'Political Subtext in a Fairy Tale from a Feminist' (New York Times, 25 September 1994).

but as a prohibition. It translates better as '(You know very well that) We don't talk about that.' Thus the dedication can be read as a declaration to resurrect the memory of the different which - according to Rowe and Schelling (1991, 228) military dictatorships destroy.⁷

Chapter One has seen that between 1966 and 1983, thousands of books were burned by the authorities, but that 'disappearing' (now an active verb) was the most extreme form of censorship during the Dirty War. The suppositions - later confirmed in Horacio Verbitsky's *El vuelo* (1995) - that 'undesirables' had been thrown out of helicopters into the sea, to be eaten by sharks, confirmed that their bodies would not be found.⁸ Thus burial became an issue in Argentina.⁹ The political point being made when Doña Leonor buries the ornamental dwarves (an action which is followed by her burning of books, mainly fairy tales, that refer to dwarfism) is one an Argentine audience would immediately recognize: the iconography of censorship, burial and its link with questions of the disappeared.¹⁰ These questions turned around the point - as Catherine Grant (2001) makes clear - that we cannot say that the disappeared are dead unless we

⁷ In Latin America, all difference is tied to questions of its 'censorship' in the collective memory. Because 'the destruction of memory (is) a prime means of domination ... the recent military dictatorships in the southern-cone countries have given new urgency to questions of social memory ... (which is) a vital cultural action in ... the preservation of ... differences' (Rowe and Schelling 1991, 228). In Argentina particularly, Rowe and Schelling (1991, 119) suggest - citing a (1985) study of the shanty-towns in Córdoba that shows that during the Dirty War (as a form of self-, rather than governmental-, surveillance) people no longer gathered together - there have been conditions under which 'massive erasure of memory can occur.'

⁸ *El vuelo* is based on the 'confessions' of naval captain Adolfo Francisco Scilingo. Interviewed by journalist Verbitsky, Scilingo remained unrepentant, arguing that he had been following orders in a time of war.

⁹ The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo were asking - not for their live children - but where their bodies were.

¹⁰ Such iconography is evidenced in Alberto Fischerman's *Los días de junio/Days of June* (Argentina, 1985), which, dealing with the disappearances, has one scene devoted to the disinterment of incendiary literature - including that of the boom novelists Mario Vargas Llosa and Gabriel García Márquez.

have evidence of their burial.¹¹ If they are not really dead, they will come back to haunt. Doña Leonor's silencing therefore has its cost: 'Murder will out.' What mode does Bemberg choose to 'out' these questions of murder?

Bemberg's acceptance of Julio Llinás' (1993) tale implies a surrealist mode for De eso no se habla. Llinás (1929-), Argentine poet and short-story writer, is a consummate surrealist. He joined the surrealist movement in Paris. Llinás' short stories, in which the unusual is made ordinary, belong to a long tradition of fantastic writing in Argentina.¹² The circus features prominently in his later oeuvre of which De eso no se habla (1993) is part. Jason Wilson (2000, 179) suggests the film's 'dreamy unfamiliarity' retains the 'surrealist angle' of Llinás tale. This chapter will dispute Wilson's reading, suggesting (however contentiously) that the 'fantastic' in the film most closely approximates to a 'magical-realist' transposition of Llinás' tale. Firstly, in Charlotte's final journey to the circus is a 'magical realist' affirmation of the gypsies who bring in new knowledge, but who represent (dangerously) the other coming in. In what is considered (controversially) to be a classic 'magical-realist' text, Cien años de soledad/One Hundred Years of Solitude, the gypsies visit Macondo, a geographically-enclosed community, who once were welcome for 'their age-old

¹¹ Catherine Grant (1997, 320) refers to the discovery after the Dirty War to mass graves known popularly as the 'No Names' or 'NN' graves. Some relatives refused this presentation of 'proof' that their loved ones were dead since this would support the 'full stop' policy of 1986 and 1987 (which attempted to halt the denunciations of Dirty War leaders, and which, controversially, was fully effected in 1989 when President Menem announced a pardon for them).

In 'Still Moving Images: Photographs of the Disappeared in Films about the "Dirty War" in Argentina', Grant (2001) suggests that in film, questions of disappearance and burial crystallised around two responses: One response (represented by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) was that of resisting closure until they had been told what had happened. The other response (represented by a break-away group of the Mothers) was to strive after an enabling of mourning, through death certificates and burial. I am indebted to Grant for provoking the following thoughts: By raising the dead and not burying them, we could say that Bemberg's film is resisting closure, and demanding reparation in the form of truth.

wisdom and fabulous inventions' but who now are considered 'the bearers of concupiscence and perversion' (Gabriel García Márquez 1978, 39).¹³

Furthermore, Charlotte's journey is to the people that a (Latin American) 'magical realism' as well as carnival enacts. The closing pages (228-229) of García Márquez' *El otoño del patriarca/The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1996, originally 1975) has the people singing 'hymns of joy' which in 'a music of liberation' and with 'rockets of jubilation' herald that 'the endless time of eternity had finally come to an end.'¹⁴ Secondly, the differences between magical realism and surrealism (discussed more fully below) have implications for their differences in form. If in surrealism what is repressed erupts from underneath, a surrealist film is constantly surrealist and hence in it the dream motif is central. Magical realism, on the other hand, favours such a close co-existence, a side-by-sideness, of the real and the 'fantastic,' that their separate definitions blur at the edges. Bemberg's film never attempts the exposition of psychological truth through dream. Its 'magical realist' moments (signaled through a day-for-night lighting and the added use of a blue lens) are not associated with dreaming, but with 'real' waking states. This is made explicit in the film when, with its first use of the blue lens (when Doña Leonor begins her expedition to destroy Widow Schmidt's ornamental dwarves), Widow Schmidt and the priest are woken up. The blue lens is used again in a different context: when d'Andrea falls in love. After analysis of this event, I will argue that its

¹² Examples in this tradition are Borges' *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan/The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941), Cortázar's *Bestiario/Bestiary* (1951), and the works of Silvina Ocampo.

¹³ There is in these words a deadpan hyperbole that is in *De eso no se habla* too.

¹⁴ I argue this point (of the people) in spite of Gerald Martin's objections (1989, 271-275) that in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* the celebrants at the death of the dictator are part of a monolithic crowd and that the form of the novel is conservative.

magical-realist moments are part of the film's treatment of d'Andrea's love, and that when they are unraveled, we see a strange feminist point.

4. D'Andrea Falls in Love with Charlotte: A Vulnerable Masculine Subjectivity

Bemberg reduces the focus from Llinás' gallery of many, onto three, characters, and turns it into a love story. The film also changes the Charlotte of Llinás' tale from a mere acrobat to a romantic artist. She thus humanises a novella which - Jason Wilson (2000) argues - is much more cruel. Nevertheless, the seventeen 'additions' that Bemberg makes from Llinás' original novella (and notably the scenes of the piano concert, the white horse and the brothel, in all of which lighting and music establish a predominant tone of melancholy) are those that reinforce d'Andrea's vulnerable, male subjectivity. In the middle of the film two sequences (of five contiguous scenes) are an intense exposition of d'Andrea's love for Charlotte. Their use of colour makes clear that his is a subjectivity that is bound up in his perception of Charlotte. These two sequences also represent the transition of the spectator's visual and audible identification from Doña Leonor towards d'Andrea. The first sequence comprises the scene of d'Andrea's witness of Charlotte riding a white horse, and the subsequent two scenes where he runs away from, and then tries to drink away, his emotion. These three scenes are linked by shared codes of colour and lighting, of washes of blue and gold that indicate Charlotte's transfiguration through d'Andrea's perception. Simultaneously, non-diegetic music augments, making further sensual, this link. d'Andrea's envisioning, sensual subjectivity is

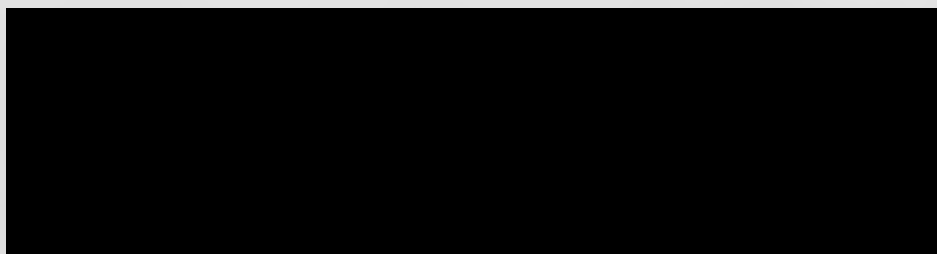
then continued into the sequence comprising the two scenes of Charlotte's piano recital.

d'Andrea falls in love with Charlotte when she is riding a magnificent white horse (that he has given to her). Jason Wilson (2000, 179) sees the horse - transformed from Llinàs' fat nag, an 'obese effeminate horse' to one of fairy-tale connotation - as the film's central visual metaphor. He draws comparisons with the white horse (representing the alter ego and impulse towards freedom) of the surrealist artist Leonora Carrington (1917-).¹⁵ Carrington was one of those female surrealist artists who challenged the surrealist view that liberation should be grounded in male activity and female passivity and in a premise of the female as Other. However this may be, I would also argue that Charlotte is reversing the symbolism of the man on horseback in Argentina, which, whilst 'a peculiarly potent and contradictory figure' (Martin 1989, 38), has become associated with machista tendencies, involving as it does the physical domination of the environment and woman. (Thus Charlotte reverses the male point of view of the film at the same time that she challenges the male surrealists' view of women as catalysts, muses and children.) Finally I posit, however, that this metaphor (surrealist or not) is perceived by d'Andrea in a 'magical-realist' way.¹⁶

¹⁵ Carrington's *Self-Portrait* (1937) shows a white hobby-horse speeding into the trees on the other side of the window from herself. In her story *The Oval Lady* (1975, originally 1935), an adolescent beauty and her hobby-horse, Tartarus, are in love. This is a type of the beauty and the beast story, which perhaps Bemberg is inverting here. Nevertheless, Jorge Goldenberg (Buenos Aires, 28 August 2000) denied any 'conscious allusions' to Carrington's horse.

¹⁶ Furthermore, Charlotte's white horse holds Latin American magical connotations other than those identified by Wilson as (European) surrealist. The white horse can be read as that of Simón Bolívar to symbolise magical transgression through boundaries. Bolívar's white horse (itself a transformation of that of Santiago - the patron saint of the Conquistadors) has magical powers: it can fly, pass through mountains, or disappear behind white smoke (Rowe and Schelling 1991, 2-6).

d'Andrea's perception occurs because Doña Leonor has brought him to witness Charlotte's happiness. Charlotte is performing wide and graceful circuits within a large barn, part of which is in shadow and part of which is flooded with sunlight emanating through its open doors. d'Andrea climbs a ladder to see her from the perspective of a high window. He settles himself into the frame of the barn's window (Fig.4.25). As he looks with unsuspecting smile, horns and strings in a minor melancholic key silence the innocence of ambient birdsong. The emotional tone of the music works here (with the simultaneous move of the camera towards Mastroianni's sad face) to mark his vulnerable subjectivity. (This music hereafter will compete with the other two musical motifs of the film - that of d'Andrea's exotic story-telling and that of circus. It is arguable that from now on it takes over from them as the theme tune, so that from this point onwards the film's theme is not that of Doña Leonor's over-protectiveness of Charlotte, but of d'Andrea's love for Charlotte.) As d'Andrea falls in love with what he beholds, his face is illuminated. As his face slowly registers a pained expression (Fig.4.26), it is gradually washed with the blue light (Fig.4.27) that (until this point) has been associated with the burial of the ornamental dwarves:

**Fig.4.25****Fig.4.26****Fig.4.27.**

Thus at the same time that it is 'magical' and connotes love, the lighting further connotes both the recent military burials in Argentina, and the refusal of their

acknowledgement. Love's illumination is the resurrection of what has been repressed in the political arena. Murder (what has been buried) returns in the form of love.¹⁷ Furthermore, the non-diegetic music resembles (by tone and key) the soft and melancholy sound we first heard when the ornamental dwarves were buried and so reinforces the connections between murder and love as in the light of d'Andrea's gaze we see Charlotte (Figs.4.28 to 4.30) transfigured by and in the horse. Charlotte is rendered magical through slow-motion, and ghostly by the silencing of the horse's footsteps. She and the horse are haloed in a golden bowl of light as if magically they were extensions of each other:

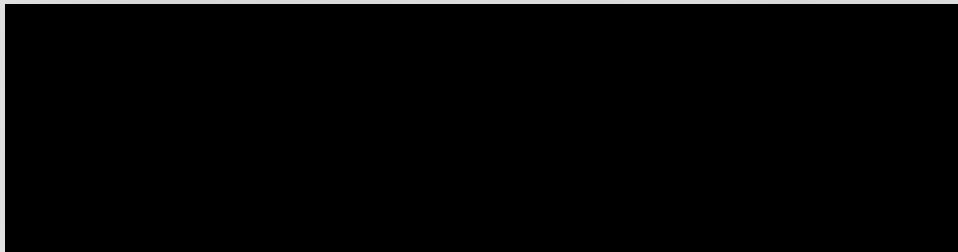
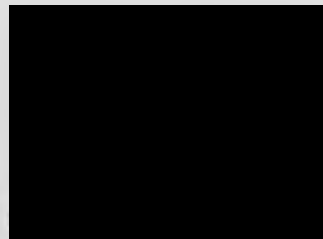


Fig.4.28

Fig.4.29

Fig.4.30.

However, when we cut from the bewitched d'Andrea watching Charlotte to the



scene of his running away, Fig.4.31 his

beatification is rendered mundane in that he expresses his distress physically.

We will - in the café where he pauses for breath - see visible signs of his sweating corporeality. Thus a 'magical' or 'fantastic', has been followed by two

¹⁷ Before the release of *De eso no se habla*, the Argentine film audience had already been educated in political visitations from 'beyond the grave.' *Sur/South* (Fernando Solanas,

straightforward or 'real', moments in the film. At the same time, the haunting music crosses all three scenes (of horse-riding, running-away and café) and allows them to partake of each other's aspects of the magical and of the 'real.'

Exactly at the moment of Charlotte's 'magical' ride the film switches from a feminine to a masculine subjectivity (from Doña Leonor to d'Andrea). This - as well as the disruptive nature of d'Andrea's love - is confirmed by the cut to the next sequence. This (the scene of Charlotte piano recital) reinforces the import of love, and love as a beholding, as well as prefaces the moment at which d'Andrea actively appropriates the narrative momentum. (This is when - visibly distressed by his love - he leaves the auditorium and instigates a duel with the doctor as a relief to his feelings. This scene is filmed in blue light.) The sequence of the recital itself shows Charlotte backstage with Mohamé and her fussing mother, the entry of the townsfolk into the auditorium, and Charlotte's playing, during which d'Andrea bursts in and watches through parted curtains. The lighting is muted so that bright, sensual, colours - specifically of the women in the auditorium - stand out. Against them, but only by d'Andrea's point-of-view shots, the brilliant white of Charlotte's dress is juxtaposed to give an ethereal effect (as in Fig.4.33). To him alone (newly-irradiated in a bright white light of his love) is she rendered a beacon in darkness:

Argentina, 1988) deals in the return of exiles to, and the haunting by the disappeared of, demilitarised Argentina. A spirit guide provides the film with its viewpoint from the tomb.

**Fig.4.32****Fig.4.33****Fig.4.34.**

Against all this is set (as in Figs.4.32 & 4.34) d'Andrea's dishevelled appearance. His distress is augmented by Mastroianni's star persona that signifies Italian art cinema, the valorisation of the heterosexual seducer and the suffering macho man. At the same time, his undone shirt indicates (comically) an unconcern for social proprieties. Thus the spectator adopts d'Andrea's tragicomic emotional position. Furthermore, sound has rendered this perceiving subjectivity multi-sensory. Charlotte plays Number 28 of the Schumann composition (Etude Opus 68) that she announces. This is Memories, an elegy for Mendelssohn, and so alludes to loss and (set in a minor key) adds to the scene's tone of melancholy. The notes of the piano predominate over all ambient sounds. Gradually they are silenced by it. The piano music is extra-diegetic to all the shots not given over to Charlotte playing so that it is the emotional thread weaving all constituents of the scene together. The melancholy is not Charlotte's own, however, reinforcing instead the intensity of d'Andrea's subjectivity, who becomes bound up in love with her by her playing. This is indicated not least in that Charlotte's (extra-diegetic) playing informs the scene outside to which we have followed d'Andrea. This is when (in the blue light of the night in which he is sitting alone) he meets the doctor and, ridiculously, instigates a duel.

How can all this be reconciled with feminism? These five contiguous scenes have given us a masculine perception associated with a raising from the dead and a new narrative momentum. This is politically symptomatic. Love is the only balm for the horrors perpetrated by military Argentina. Chapter Five will show how in Bemberg's films a vulnerable man (principally in the figure of the lover) is not free from blame. In this last film the vulnerable man is made to admit and pay for his responsibilities. This is consonant with a feminist challenge, and with magical realism.

5. 'Magical Realism'

This thesis recognizes that 'magical realism' (a term incorporating its distinction from 'realism') is a contentious label. The debate surrounding it is complex. Because 'magical realism' has not been successfully differentiated from the genres of the baroque, of fabulation and of fantasy, some critics have abandoned the term.¹⁸ As a hybrid offspring of multiple cultural heritages, magical realism is an expression of many post-colonial (but geographically-diverse) cultures. Nevertheless, I briefly delineate my definitions of its aesthetics and politics, which (I posit) approximate to the strange narrative mode of *De eso no se habla*.

¹⁸ The term 'magical realism' itself was first used by Franz Roh in *Nach-Expressionismus (Magischer Realismus): Probleme der Neuesten Europäischen Malerei* (1925) to describe how - in German Expressionism - there was not a departure from, but a communication of, the real. Roh's article and ideas (translated and disseminated in Spanish through the *Revista de Occidente* in 1927) were taken up by Latin American (and Caribbean) writers. In Latin America, 'magical realism' has been associated with two major periods: the 1940s and 1950s, where perceptions of the marvelous were connected to a vision of reality, and the 'boom' period of the late 1950s' and 1960s' Latin American novel. Thus the term that originally described the German pictorial has since (in the popular perception) described the Latin American literary. Furthermore, its present definition also largely opposes Roh's definition of it as a communication of the real. Ángel Flores (1955, in Faris and Parkinson Zamora 1995) traces the inception of Latin American magical realism during this century to a reaction to the 'blind alley' of photographic realism. As such, it establishes connections with traditions of the quixotic chivalry that were temporarily eclipsed by nineteenth-century and twentieth-century realism. As a reaction to realism, magical realism presents a shift in emphasis from psychological to social and political concerns. (Gabriel García Márquez, for example, insists that he is a social, not a magical, realist.)

These (albeit loose and sometimes eclectic) definitions are prompted (in the main) by the polemics of Alejo Carpentier (1949 and 1975) because firstly, he distinguishes all post-colonial magical realisms from European surrealism, and secondly, he discriminates the Latin American from all other 'marvelous realisms.'¹⁹ Thus he did not use the term 'magical realism,' preferring 'The Marvelous American Real.' This terminology better intimates the (American) sense of marvel inherent within, rather than (as is the case with surrealism) beneath, the ordinary. Nevertheless, I realize that Carpentier's ideas concerning marvel are used in consideration of a more northern Latin American, than Argentine artistic practice. Neither Carpentier's 'marvelous real' nor 'magical realism' has been commonly agreed as a descriptor of Argentine artistic practice, which is in fact more akin to the European surrealism that Carpentier dismisses.²⁰

In terms of its aesthetics, magical realism (whose terminology - as an oxymoron - suggests clash) mixes real with fantastic events (such as we have seen in the treatment of d'Andrea's sweating beautification by love), beauty with ugliness, ordinary with grotesque characters, and the comic with the sad. The clash of emotion is reinforced aesthetically through an appeal to heightened and multifarious senses, which it tends to confuse. The reader or viewer is thereby disorientated (as we have been by the tragi-comic tone of the film's opening),

¹⁹ Nevertheless, as his are polemical essays, Carpentier's understanding of surrealism begs greater nuance. This is demonstrated in Jason Wilson's (1979) study on Octavio Paz. Rather than trace influences, Wilson evaluates affinities between European surrealism and the practice/attitude of one Mexican poet. Thus Wilson argues that there are versions of surrealism, and thus he redefines it.

²⁰ At the same time, Ángel Flores (1955, in Faris and Parkinson Zamora 1995) does propose Borges' *Historia universal de la infamia/A Universal History of Infamy* (1975, originally 1935) as the birth of magical realism. Although this has been contested, Borges' work is conceded to

although in a pleasurable way. In terms of its comparison to surrealism, magical realism tries to discover what is already mysterious in things, whereas surrealism (as evidenced in its declaration by manifesto) creates marvel through transmuting the real. Thus a magical-realist aesthetic requires a new optic – wonder, as apprehending inherent marvel (Carpentier 1975, 105). That marvel (in the Latin American context) is expressed in a baroque (decorative) aesthetic of excess that celebrates the grotesque as well as the lovely. Carpentier (1975, 100) says that the baroque was engendered in Latin America out of the criollo awareness of being other. Thus is 'difference' celebrated.

In its celebrations of the grotesque (and in terms of its politics) magical realism is a subversive mode. Nevertheless, because its aesthetic is 'fantastic' (poesis displacing mimesis), magical realism prioritises allusion over direct (political) statement. Thus its subversions are gentle. In celebrating the 'different,' it confuses hierarchies, and (rather than bring into the centre those on the edge), moves its point of focus to the margins.²¹ In this sense (as well as in its celebration of the grotesque), it is close to the carnivalesque principle that 'abolishes hierarchies (and) levels social classes,' and gives voice to 'all that is marginalised and excluded' (Stam 1992, 86). If all magical realism expresses the sense of being on the edge of the 'principal' (European) world, it therefore, however, expresses the sense of reference to that world. In other words, it expresses the sense of being between worlds. Situated between worlds, magical-realist texts often place the condition of liminality in spiritual territory, where

be an influence. Thus 'magical realism' would appear to owe something to Argentina in its inception.

²¹ In its celebration of the eccentric, magical realism is to be distinguished from realism which is centralizing (Faris and Parkinson Zamora 1995, 3).

transformation and metamorphosis are common.²² Thus magical realism not only speaks across national boundaries, it speaks about crossing them, and ghosts (floating free of time and space) abound in magical-realist fiction.

d'Andrea's 'illumination' illustrates the film's construction of love as a 'marvelous real' perception. It also accords with Frederic Jameson's (1986 and 1998) ideas concerning the use of colour in magical-realist film.²³ Whilst I have reservations about his analyses of the magical real in film, for Jameson (as for Carpentier), magical realism is a mode in which the object world with which it deals is already transfigured in a poetic way. If this way of envisioning things comes from a heightened reality (a reality that is already of itself magical), its apprehension must cause in the viewer a metamorphosis in perception. In magical-realist film, this perception is prompted by an unusual, multi-sensory, use of colour, which (endowed with more than just visual sensations) irritates the eye, rather than seduces it with gloss. Thus colour (drawing attention to a new optic) 'arrests' us (Jameson 1986, 302) and begins to call for 'a different

²² Nevertheless, the liminality is felt in nation-specific ways and has specific expression. Argentina's 'on-edginess' is that of a 'peripheral modernity' (Sarlo 1993, 9-18).

²³ Jameson twice (1986 and 1998) discusses magical realism as a filmic mode. (The 1986 article, 'On Magic Realism in Film', is the sole critical address to magical-realist film per se.) In the 1998 article, 'Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity' (in Jameson 1998, 93-135), Jameson makes passing reference to magical realism in a wider discussion of postmodern films, their loss of history, general tendency towards nostalgia and their so-called waning of affect. Here he discusses Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* (United Kingdom, 1986), and Paul Leduc's *Frida* (Mexico, 1983) and *Latino bar/Latin Bar* (Mexico, 1991). Because, Jameson argues, the postmodern world is incapable of dealing with time and history, so the postmodernist historical film has become the nostalgia film, in which there is an 'enfeeblement of narrative time' (1998, 129-130). In place of narrative time, the present moment is aesthetically highlighted in a painterly strategy, in which there is a separation of form from content. The love of the surface, which is manifested in 'glossiness,' spreads a sheen over the entire screen, and thereby transforms objects into images. The intensifying of experience to the vivified present moment means the loss of history and a loss of genuine affect. He distinguishes this loss of history from the 'magical-realist,' self-conscious anachronisms of films like *Caravaggio*. For the 1986 article, Jameson derives his theory from three distinct (again not all Latin American) films: *Goraczka/Fever* (Agnieszka Holland, Poland, 1981). *La casa de agua/The House of Water* (Jacobo Penzo, Venezuela, 1984) and *Cóndores no entierran todos los días/They Don't Bury*

kind of visual attention' (Jameson 1998, 129). In De eso no se habla the new visual attention required of the spectator has been made self-conscious at the very point at which - his face bathed in blue - d'Andrea falls in love.

Furthermore, whilst he is the spectator to Charlotte (haloed in her golden bowl of light), he is arrested by colour. In his thesis that Bemberg's film retains surrealist elements, Wilson (2000, 175) contends that the film (as opposed to the novella) makes d'Andrea recognise 'the artist or misfit in (Charlotte),' and that by adding the scene of the piano recital Bemberg gives us visual insight into her artistic talent. Analysis has suggested, however, that d'Andrea does not fall in love with Charlotte as an artist, but for how he envisions her. Thus this moment is more magically-real than surreal. Furthermore, at the very point that d'Andrea 'envisions' Charlotte, her slow motion enacts an arrest by colour.

Just as magical realism is about the perception (not the creation) of the mysterious in the real, the blue light of d'Andrea's love is magical because it envisions the world afresh. But to envision the world afresh does not mean innocence. If murder and love are linked, d'Andrea is now required by the narrative (because of his love) to take responsibility and as a man. Following the recital and in the blue light of night, d'Andrea instigates the duel, and its ensuing events (including his eventual marriage to Charlotte) in the film's narrative.²⁴ As the film, however, now works to reinforce d'Andrea's love and narrative, Charlotte's desires and story (in which so far, she has been riding in a

Condors Every Day (Gustavo Álvarez Gardeazábal, Colombia, 1984). Thus Jameson's is a narrow definition, generalised on the basis of minimal empirical data.

²⁴ At the same time, the duel parodies (Argentine) machismo in its theatrical display of masculinity. See Appendix Seven, The Representation in Film of the Post-Dictatorship Argentine Man.

circle) recede further from us. This, however, has been a feminist 'trick' - revealed as such at the film's end. Here (at the circus and in her alignment with carnival) the sense of Charlotte's 'point of view' in upwardly-tilted and shaky camera, is forced upon us and turns our previous involvements and sympathies on their heads. This scene replaces the previous subjectivities of Doña Leonor and d'Andrea so that the spectator position now becomes that of Charlotte. Because they were formally inscribed, their subjectivities have had to be formally erased in the use of a hand-held camera. This camera makes us re-evaluate the formal seductions in which we have previously been caught up. We may have hoped that the wedding ended the story happily ever after, but our construction as sympathisers with d'Andrea and with Doña Leonor is now brought into question.

6. Carnival, 'Magical Realism' and a Tender Grotesque

Charlotte achieves our questioning in a sequence whose subject matter is the world of spectacle. This time, however, she visits a world beyond the polite confines of bourgeois spectacle to which public piano recitals conform. Although her mother has made a polite spectacle of her, Bemberg does not. That her camera (and tale) calls a dwarf a dwarf is exemplified both when she makes Charlotte take a public bow at her piano recital (hence reveal and celebrate her stature), and when she finally films the circus grounds from a lower than average vantage point. Nevertheless, the tenderness with which Charlotte is filmed is key to the complex tone of the film. Bemberg talked about how finding the right tone (in relation especially to Charlotte's dwarfdom) was crucial: 'She couldn't be ferocious like Buñuel ... because of her fear of

humiliating her leading woman.²⁵ Charlotte is always filmed with sensitivity. This has been exemplified in that - even though (especially when) we are looking with the male protagonist's eye - Charlotte is rendered magical. Furthermore, the film has only one lingering close up of Charlotte (arguably mitigated because in a two shot, when she is getting ready for the piano recital) in which she is indeed, as her mother says, beautiful:



Fig.4.35

In fact the tenderness of the film (and of its treatment of Charlotte) proceeds from the sense of Doña Leonor's 'motherly' (as much as it does from d'Andrea's) love.²⁶ This chapter's analysis has seen the opening scene establish the mother's repressions. Nevertheless, even though Doña Leonor's self-immolating melancholy may be opposed to the children's laughter, the bond between mother and daughter is clear. If it is a tie, it is a loving one. In the first shot of them together at the party (Fig.4.21), the framing in mellow lighting of mother and child contrasts with the bright whiteness of the cake, and suggests an intimacy and warmth between them. The contrast continues with Doña Leonor's expressions conveying mistrust towards the space (and women) off-screen, but those of solicitude towards her child. This begins in the spectator an ambivalent response to Doña Leonor whose social prejudices cause much of her suffering, but who shows deep affection towards Charlotte, who is, as the narrator informs us, 'The apple of her eye.'

²⁵ In 'Political Subtext in a Fairy Tale from a Feminist' (*New York Times*, 25 September 1994).

Through the mother's eye and through d'Andrea's love, Bemberg transposes not just events and character, but the more cruelly-grotesque surrealist mode of the original tale. Nevertheless, more positive aspects of the grotesque (in relation to Charlotte) are retained. The children's laughter from Charlotte's party at the film's beginning reinforces carnival's celebration of difference whilst being at the same time light, playful and tender. We hear, moreover, a collective laughter of children, which, in carnival, 'erases old differences and installs new, unstable ones' and is 'the adult memory of cascading giggles of children, who laugh not necessarily at specific localizable 'jokes' but as part of a collective contagion' (Stam 1992, 120). In carnival, however, this collective contagion can be cruel, whereas Bemberg turns Bakhtin's carnivalesque into a gentler laughter. Furthermore, although the laughter proceeds playfully from the world of children, it is directed onto characters (such as Doña Leonor) rather than onto Charlotte.

The grotesque in this film belongs to Doña Leonor's distortions of the truth, and of her own and Charlotte's dress. Whilst she suppresses talk of her daughter's small stature, Doña Leonor speaks vicariously her claim to bourgeois ladyship and dresses Charlotte 'excessively.' The result (but of Doña Leonor's pretensions only) is a grotesque 'baroque.' (Chapter Seven will elaborate Doña Leonor's 'baroque', as in 'excessive,' sense of dress in discussing her 'theatrics' of femininity.) At the same time, even in the sense that Doña Leonor's loud dressing (of Charlotte too) is grotesque, the film celebrates the 'ugly.' Firstly, it

²⁶ Chapter Five will suggest that the paradoxical nature of Doña Leonor's repressions of her child is bound up in her love for her. This is clear in the scene (analysed in that chapter) in which

celebrates the ugly in terms of that Latin American baroque which is excessive. By the time of Charlotte's wedding, Doña Leonor wears a flamboyant blue dress, which, however it shines excessively by its 'tacky' texture and by her movements within it (as Chapter Seven will see), is glorious indeed. Secondly, it celebrates the ugly as Carpentier's thing of wonder. Hence the emotion of wonder with which d'Andrea perceives Charlotte and that has also informed Charlotte's view of the circus. Thus the carnivalesque, which 'sees all the senses as equally noble and "positively" grotesque' (Stam 1992, 159) meets with the 'magical real' in a softened baroque. This is especially clear in the scene that - giving reign to that baroque aesthetic of excess that, according to Carpentier expresses marvel - sees Charlotte get married.

7. Charlotte Gets Married

Although the wedding banquet in De eso no se habla reinforces the film's allusions to carnival (in terms of its laughter, festivity, music, splash of colour and appeal to many senses), it converts what Jason Wilson (2000, 175) calls the 'Buñuelesque or grotesque marriage' of Llinás' tale to a 'wonderful,' gentle treatment of Charlotte. The sequence of the wedding banquet in De eso no se habla is six minutes long. There are a total of twenty-eight shots. It interweaves many mini narratives: of the wedding banquet (in which is music and festivity); the police sergeant's discovery of the mayor who, having died in church, is being preserved by Doña Leonor in the ice store (in which, for the spectator, is laughter); the cutting of the cake and the throwing of the bouquet. Finally, there are the shots of the wedding couple's dance (in which Charlotte and d'Andrea -

Charlotte tells her mother that she has accepted d'Andrea's proposal.

filmed from a distance - are magically and amorphously enveloped in her white dress. Here is tenderness). The sequence has a tight rhythm. It is played out between two contrasting scenes, of a dark inside space, and a bright outside space. These are respectively the preserving of the dead mayor in the bath of ice, and the wedding banquet itself. The bath of ice inflects the comic tone with bizarreness. There are rhyming two shots of Doña Leonor and of the police sergeant, and of d'Andrea and Charlotte. The sequence begins (before a cut to a close-up two shot of Charlotte and d'Andrea) with an establishment shot that pans down trestle tables, as shown in:

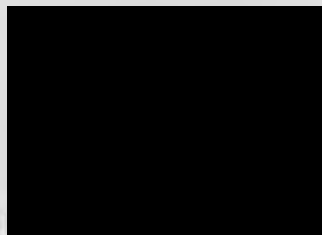
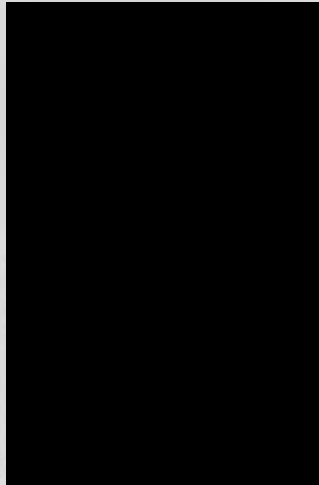


Fig.4.36 (Later in the pan, children run between the tables.) The (diegetic) Felliniesque music of wedding musicians is almost constant. Against this is counterpointed the sharp, clear ambient voices of revelry and the clinking of bottles in the ice store, giving a note of clash and comic disharmony.

The dance (which ends the sequence on the wedding couple's dissolve into the sea and to the sad tones of Mohamé's voice-over) is deceptively magical. It forms a mini narrative lasting one minute, fifty-four seconds. This narrative - of eleven shots across which the camera performs a clockwise circle - is patterned as a palindrome.²⁷ Shots one and eleven balance each other in length and exactly mirror each other in fluid and symmetrical camera movement. Between

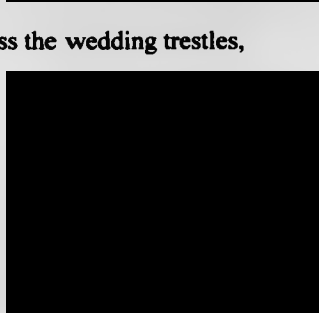
these two framing shots is a pattern of still tableaux: of two shots and close ups with, in shot six (exactly in the middle), a close-up shot of Doña Leonor, as satisfied mother-in-law (Fig.4.41). In the first shot, on d'Andrea's twist of Charlotte clockwise in the distance,

Fig.4.37



the camera starts moving down,

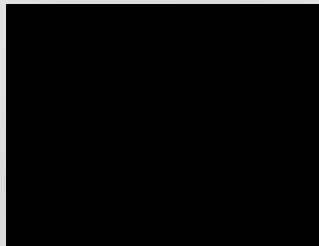
Fig.4.38



then briefly to the right before moving

left across the wedding trestles,

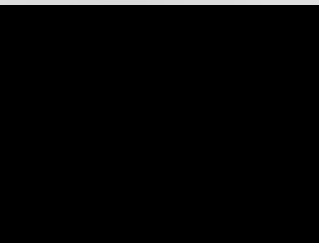
Fig.4.39



and finally down (as the head musician

whom it is tracking bows to Doña Leonor,

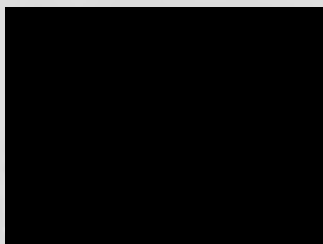
Fig.4.40



before it bends down to frame her self-

²⁷ Note that whilst Figs 4.37 to 4.46 are chronologically captured from the wedding sequence, they do not comprise all eleven shots of the sequence.

delighting): **Fig.4.41**



Now the camera slows

down to register the wedding tables in a shadow that counterpoints the whiteness of the canopy and of the dancers - out in the bright light - and white against the background foam of the sea:

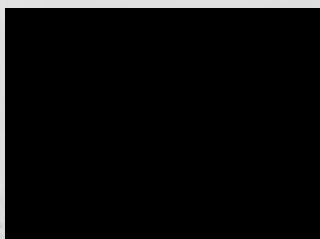


Fig.4.42

The tenth shot has the camera moving

(in reverse directions to those of the first shot) to the left and then up and over the entire scene (Fig.4.43) to frame in its far centre (Fig.4.44) the dancing couple as they make their way towards the sea:

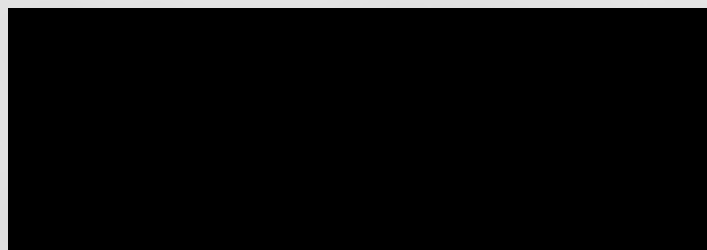


Fig.4.43

Fig.4.44.

The dancing pair, however, fade in just to the right side of the ray of sun and the voice-over begins (Fig.4.45), just before the dissolve (Fig.4.46), with, 'As everyone knows, happiness is an undeniable state, but it can only be explained when it has disappeared':

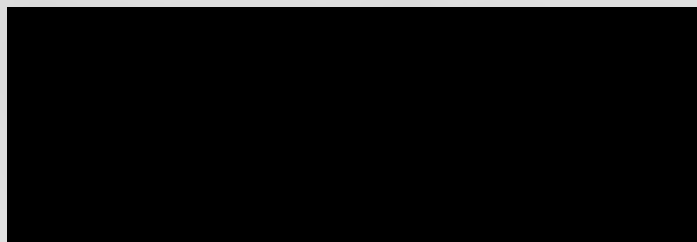


Fig.4.45

Fig.4.46.

The soft melancholy of Bemberg's wedding scene belongs to the world of Fellini. The many stylistic allusions to Fellini (such as in Nicola Piovane's music and in Mastroianni himself) also point up the carnivalesque nature of Bemberg's tale. There are specific references to the scene of the wedding in La strada (Italy, 1956).²⁸ In La strada, unlikely heroine Gelsomina, a hapless woman and child of a poor family, accompanies Zampano in his circus travels and two-man travelling show. Although she is in virtual bondage to him, she learns the art of circus so well, symbolised in her beautiful trumpet playing, that she achieves creative self-expression. She lacks, however, the final courage to join a troupe and Zampano is left to mourn his cruelty to her when he learns of her lonely death, years after his abandonment of her. At one point in the narrative, they entertain together at a country wedding. In La strada's wedding sequence (as with Bemberg's film) there is an outside (where the wedding banquet takes place) and a darker inside, something hidden away, 'a child with a big head,' Gelsomina says. After the establishment long shot, followed by a closer shot of Gelsomina dancing,

²⁸ These references are notwithstanding that Fellini's composer for La strada was Nino Rota.

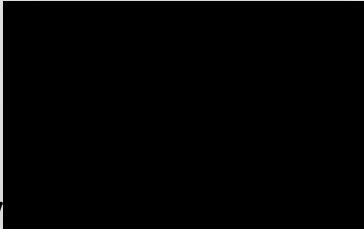
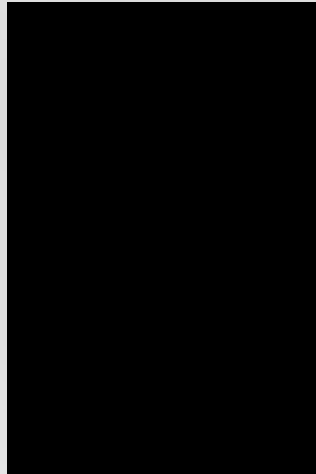
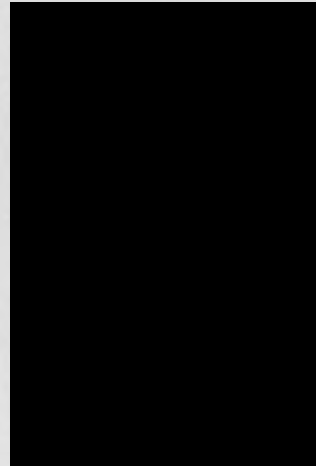
Fig.4.47  there is a long camera pan (Figs.4.48 to 4.51) from left to right over wedding trestles at which we see the wedding guests fighting and throwing food:

Fig.4.48**Fig.4.49****Fig.4.50****Fig.4.51**

The configuration (and shooting) of the wedding banquet trestles, as well as the diegetic string music, are echoed in those of Bemberg's film. To what effect is Bemberg making her reference deliberate?

Bemberg's tale - like Fellini's films - is allegorical, belonging to the world of myth and fairy tale, where truths are not literal but profound and of wide application. The similarity in spirit to Fellini's *La strada* emphasises a difference in point, however, for where Gelsomina cannot escape her bondage of cruel 'husband' and learns her true self within it, Charlotte is only free when she escapes the kindness of her husband. The sense (deceptively) is of a magical

harmony that is absent from *La strada*. Thus *De eso no se habla*'s wedding scene is another 'magical-realist' trick, and no more so that in its tender (deceptive) treatment of Charlotte in her white dress. This beautiful vision of Charlotte is not how she sees herself. Charlotte takes up where Gelsomina did not dare to go: with the circus. Her riding away symbolises not only escape from small-town mentality, but also the beginning of her journey to herself.²⁹ The film's most magical-realist moment comes in turning upside down all of our expectations and celebrating - finally - a different woman's different autonomy. This is to be found on the edge of things: in Argentina, as well as in that wider, although marginal, world of spectacle and life, the circus. Carnival and the magical real have met.

Conclusion

A magical-realist aesthetic that implies transformation speaks a story best that is not only about the right to be, but about the right to become. A magical-realist mode is equal to the representation of (Charlotte's) diversity as something strange and disorientating. In the film we experience disorientation aesthetically: in the switch to strange rather than realistic uses of colour at moments of significant charge, and in a disorientating because shaky hold of the camera when Charlotte is at last allowed to express differently her way of seeing. Thus the film's magical-realist mode (as one that upturns ways of representing things) allows Charlotte to have her say. The spectator's disorientation at this upside-down-ness comes at moments of attempt (like Charlotte's) to cross a boundary. The boundaries transgressed in this film are

²⁹ It is insensitive to the spirit of the film to object that Charlotte is placed in 'a world of freaks' (Britto, 1994).

multifarious: those of social propriety (a respectable woman does not go about in the night attacking her neighbour's ornamental dwarves with a pickaxe), of sexual propriety ('complete' men do not fall in love with dwarves), of public respectability (Mayoresses are not in the habit of fleeing to the circus) and of public collusion in the state's guilt (Argentines do not talk about their recent disappeared).

The disappearance of the 'different' in Argentina extends to the collective consciousness or memory of their existence. Recent history haunts Bemberg's film and its ghosts make absence present. The political import of the film is to raise the spectre of the Argentine disappeared. In *De eso no se habla* a presence from the past - as signified in the burial of the dwarves - returns in the form of love when d'Andrea falls for Charlotte. What has been erased - the memory of the tortured bodies of the disappeared - has arisen to haunt. To reverse such erasure (as this film does) is to reinstate the memory of 'everyone' who dares to be 'different.' Because such memories return in the form of love, they are given new life. Thus, when d'Andrea wrests the narrative from Doña Leonor's control, the film switches direction from towards death to towards life. What will not be talked about will speak in other ways. In this way is difference celebrated.

In these magical-realist scenes that allude to memories of the disappeared, a man is redeemed by his love. Argentina's political ghosts are exorcised through d'Andrea's speaking his love. Furthermore, the political analogies of remembering become linked in some way with the question of male love. This

is Bemberg's film of forgiveness of men and their tyrannies. d'Andrea sums up the spirit of the film (in answer to crude taunts in the brothel at his forthcoming marriage) when he says that 'Love is rare - and most rare are the chosen ones.' Thus through its magical-realist treatment of love Bemberg's text is made more tender than the original tale, at the same time that it has been dealing in something grotesque.

The grotesque is revealed to be marvelous, so that a voice, a camera, is given to both d'Andrea and to Charlotte, to the 'blind' and the silenced, respectively. Whilst Charlotte's voice reverses a male surrealist viewpoint, her child's eye perspective is important in that it suggests recognition of the 'marvelous,' in other words, of the revelatory. This is what we see at work in the last five minutes of the film, as well as in d'Andrea's wonder at Charlotte on her horse. Nevertheless, it is not for d'Andrea the happy ending that we have been expecting. It is for Charlotte the happier one for which we should have been hoping. Ultimately, Charlotte is the most important figure in the film. All questions of repression, as object of what will not be talked about, refer to her. Her transgression is not so much in her escape to the circus but in her courage (in the last five minutes of the film) to look at and to show through a hand-held camera the world anew. In her final appropriation of autonomy she is the final resistor of repression and makes the film speak a new language.

The second part of this thesis will now ask what new (feminist) language Bemberg makes her camera speak.

PART TWO:

FEMINISM

CHAPTER FIVE

Moving Beyond the Window: Early Feminist Film Theory and Resistant Stories

Introduction

Cinematic language - feminist or otherwise - is spoken through the 'look' (in other words, the gaze and mise-en-scène) and through narrative. Bemberg's films follow the classic, linear narratives that are more often associated with masculine texts. In the 1980s (when Bemberg was making her early films) there was a feminist call to return to narrative. In 'Desire in Narrative' (in Alice Doesn't, 1984, 157) Teresa de Lauretis claimed that feminist cinema should be 'narrative and Oedipal with a vengeance'.¹ This chapter asks how the 'story' of Bemberg's protagonists challenges the spectator identifications set up by classic, realist narratives, through which are vindicated the actions of a male hero and the containment of the woman. In other words, it considers the representations of the female protagonist's agency in narrative.

Chapter One saw that Bemberg recognized in the cinema an ability to speak to repressed peoples (notably women) and begin their identification with a transgression of the restrictions that hem them in. In each of Bemberg's films

¹ Vengeance implies getting back (for women) a story that once women told another way. The Oedipus myth (emerging during the patriarchal system) turned the princess and her assignment of a difficult task into the sphinx and her riddle, and hence turned her from agent to obstacle. Thus if there was once a larger role for the princess which a feminist cinema must retrieve, this must be done not just by narrative but by reversing woman's representation as passive object and obstacle. Until we change woman's representation in narrative, de Lauretis argues (1965, 112),

the spectator is asked to identify with a heroine who is transgressive in that she defies and moves beyond the particular boundaries imposed on her. Crossing a boundary involves a journey and a quest; in other words it demands a narrative. There are seven heroines (six of whom are placed in the centre of and motivate the narrative) in Bemberg's films. They are Lucía in Momentos, Leonora in Señora de Nadie, the eponymous Camila and Miss Mary, Sor Juana in Yo, la peor de todas, and Doña Leonor and her daughter Charlotte in De eso no se habla. This chapter discusses the importance of having 'positive' women protagonists for a feminist film practice. Early feminist theory, from Molly Haskell (1987) to Annette Kuhn (1982), E. Ann Kaplan (1983), Charlotte Brunsdon (1986) and Christine Geraghty (1986) - at the time when Bemberg began making her films - considered the way in which women were constructed as heroines. Therefore, before this thesis examines how the protagonist is made agent of the desiring look in Bemberg's films (taking account of later feminist film theory), it looks at what Bemberg's seven heroines do - what journey they make - that is, it posits, 'transgressive.' In other words, who (and what obstacles) do they encounter on their way, how do they resist and get beyond them, and of what themes are they thus made agent? The answers to these questions will suggest that as their journey develops across the films, the obstacles each protagonist must resist and the boundaries they must transgress become redefined.²

Oedipus' quest and Freud's question, 'What is femininity?' will remain one and the same, leaving woman out as an addressee.

² Sometimes the transgressive action can only be measured against the repressive power of the gaze, and sometimes the nature of the obstacle must be gauged by its representation via the *mise-en-scène*. Thus, although the focus of this chapter is narrative, analysis of the film's formal constructions will sometimes here anticipate that (in Chapters Six and Seven) of Bemberg's construction of the gaze and *mise-en-scène*.

1. The Transgressive Narrative Trajectory of Bemberg's Female

Protagonist

Each film follows a narrative that is impelled by the heroine's actions of an urge towards freedom. Lucía has an affair with a younger man, but returns to her husband at the film's end. Leonora leaves her husband and children and is independent at the film's end. Camila elopes with a priest but is captured and executed. She also reads illicit (romantic) books. Hence her transgression is intellectual as well as sexual. Miss Mary has an affair with her young charge - a transgression that she later renounces. Sor Juana also renounces her transgression, which was to write poetry in defiance of the Mexican Church's expectations of women in the 17th century. Nevertheless, Miss Mary's and Juana's actions are transgressive indeed. Miss Mary transgresses (if only temporarily) her inhibitions and the patriarchal codes of 'honour' that she has imbibed. Juana's lessons are spied on (by nuns complicit with the priests ranged against her). She is told to leave the music lesson when she tells her schoolgirls, 'Nor is it only for men - the freedom to question the secrets of the universe.' She continues, showing courageous defiance, 'Remember - your eyes open, ears also. So you see everything.' In the next film Doña Leonor may be sexually independent but her mind is closed. She counterpoints the creative transgressions of her daughter Charlotte who joins the circus in an act that celebrates rather than tries to disguise her marginal status as a dwarf. Charlotte, Bemberg's final protagonist, has broken entirely free at the end of the film, by celebrating her 'different' status, and by claiming her own mode of vision. The film is dedicated to 'Everyone who has the courage to be different.'

If we read the seven heroines as one composite protagonist, we see the heroine move from the domestic bourgeois home to the circus, and evolve from bourgeois wife leaving her husband to a dwarf fighting her mother for her right to creative self-expression. This composite reading is justified by this chapter's consideration that narrative themes continue and develop across the films even though the narrative modes move from the autobiographical, through the historical to the 'fabulous.' The collective action of these seven heroines describes a trajectory of transgression of domestic before more universal boundaries: from against men as represented in *Family* (Momentos, Señora de Nadie and Camila), to against Church and State (Camila and Yo, la peor de todas). Whilst Yo, la peor de todas begins a widening of the female protagonist's trajectory (moving beyond an Argentine border to Mexico), Bemberg's last heroine, Charlotte, describes - in her bid for freedom - the composite protagonist's entire narrative trajectory as she moves beyond the domestic home and beyond Argentina to the 'everywhere' of fable and to gain wider than sexual freedoms.³

This chronology also points up how Bemberg's protagonist moves from autobiographical representation to women with specific well-known Latin American identities. Thus the trajectory of Bemberg's female protagonist (from the first to the penultimate film) mirrors the development of other feminist

³ Here Bemberg's project is again close to that of Margarethe von Trotta. It is not just that in Die Bleierne Zeit/Marianne and Juliane (West Germany, 1981) the protagonist Juliane (like Leonora in Señora de Nadie) dares to be on her own, but that, as for Sor Juana, her intellectual life must take priority. Indeed Juliane's intellectual work is a personal project for which she sacrifices her relationship with a man. Furthermore, it is through the intellectual project that both filmmakers explore a blurring of public with private worlds, and political with personal concerns. If Bemberg's protagonist begins where she herself did, within the home, von Trotta's (like Bemberg's) women are clearly positioned within their environments, against windows,

filmmakers in the late 1970s. Yvonne Rainer has said of her own work (in Cook and Bernink 1999, 355) that she moved from descriptions of an individual woman to those of 'individual feminine experience placed in radical juxtaposition against historical events, to explicitly feminist speculations about feminine experience.' Of this trajectory Rainer adds (pertinently to this chapter's discussion of narrative), 'I have just formulated an evolution which in becoming more explicitly feminist seems to demand a more solid anchoring in narrative conventions.' Nevertheless, this thesis will suggest that Bemberg's feminist challenges in her last film become less explicit and more complex, and suggest that her practice is moving towards a post-feminist one. De eso no se habla makes clear that patriarchal ordinances are just as oppressive when laid down by a woman. The figure whose boundaries Charlotte transgresses is her mother.

Miss Mary is an anomalous, although pivotal, film in the trajectory both of Bemberg's filmmaking and of her protagonist. By the time the protagonist has become Camila her transgressions against the family are linked to a broader critique of nationalism. Miss Mary then becomes exemplary of the idea that the family becomes the symptom and microcosm of a wider patriarchal corruption and repression. Although Miss Mary keeps within the boundaries of Argentina (and the protagonist herself strives to keep within a family) the film's metaphors suggest a wider, political, world. Miss Mary herself, as repressed, élitist and racist governess ('Get your hands off me, you native,' she says when an Argentine peasant asks her to dance at a wedding), is Bemberg's critique of

grilles and within the home, as well as in outside spaces. See Appendix Six, María Luisa Bemberg and Margarethe von Trotta.

colonialism. Nevertheless, in allowing herself one night of passion with Johnny, Miss Mary aligns herself temporarily with a new order, which he can be seen to represent.⁴ However (exceptionally), this protagonist forecloses the possibility of her own freedom. The last image directs us to thoughts of Miss Mary's world, contracted to the contents of her trunk that is suspended in mid-flight to the ship that will carry her home - an older, but not a wiser, woman. The trunk is apt metaphor for the protagonist's journey towards freedom (which - suspended as it is in Miss Mary - is halted). That no transgressor breaks free in Miss Mary nevertheless reiterates not only the strength of the obstacles that Bemberg's women are up against but their doubled insidiousness when women become complicit in them.

One of the most complicit women is Doña Leonor in Bemberg's last film De eso no se habla. In her obsessive protection of her daughter, she is the engine of the film in that she instigates all the narrative events (until the point when d'Andrea becomes Charlotte's suitor).⁵ In all of the events that she controls - such as the burial of the ornamental dwarves, and the manipulation of the vote for Charlotte to play the piano - she is equated with the dictator. In so being she represses her own daughter's freedoms and so controls the point of view, that the audience does not 'see' Charlotte properly. Nevertheless, despite the fact that we are never, until the end of the film (when she joins the circus), accorded Charlotte's point of view, there have been three scenes (in the second half of the film) when

⁴ Bemberg says of Johnny, 'Indeed sometimes men seem to understand women's issues more than some women, who are so blocked and scared and stupefied by their upbringing' (in Monthly Film Bulletin, October 1987, 293).

⁵ A male narrative is replicated in the wider field of feminist filmmaking in the 1990s, when women - such as Antonia Bird with Priest (United Kingdom, 1994) and Katherine Bigelow with Point Break (USA, 1991) - turned their attention from female to male subjects again.

we 'glimpse' her. These scenes show Charlotte listening to d'Andrea's traveller's tales, acting as Carmen (to her mother's horror) in front of her bedroom mirror, and finally, giving her public piano recital. Listening to d'Andrea's stories, Charlotte asks 'What are the tropics like?' To his answer, Charlotte's look of wonder right into the camera is directed (not at d'Andrea but) at the fabric of those 'exotic' fantasies which eventually she will realize. The Carmen and piano scenes intimate Charlotte's final rebellion. She continues to dance as Carmen after her mother stops the gramophone, and in the scene of the piano recital she acts against her mother's proscriptions by walking out to the front of the stage and taking a bow. Nevertheless (and despite - in the piano scene - rare close ups of Charlotte), in all of these scenes we are looking at and not with her. Thus these scenes indicate the repressive nature of the barriers that Charlotte's actions are up against. Nevertheless, she wins out. Significantly, there is a marked lightening of tone between the penultimate and last films. As Charlotte leaves with the circus, we see (in Fig.5.7) that Bemberg's protagonist is happy. Thus Charlotte is the most important figure in Bemberg's last film and the most successful of all seven protagonists.

2. Narrative Themes

Whilst analysis of the protagonist's journey in Bemberg's films reveals that she encounters formidable patriarchal obstacles, on her way and in her battle against them, she is made agent of (themes of) solidarity and love.

A. Patriarchal Obstacles

Bemberg's heroines transgress patriarchal boundaries (of Church and State) that circumscribe their sexual and intellectual development. Thus men are not obstacles as lovers, but as their masculinity is shored up in (secular and sacred) institutional roles of husband (Momentos and Señora de Nadie), father (Camila and Miss Mary) and priest (Camila, Yo, la peor de todas and De eso no se habla). Sometimes these obstacles take female form. Chapter Two identified husbands as the obstacles in Bemberg's autobiographical films. Chapter Three discussed the representation of priests in Yo, la peor de todas in the light of Bemberg's historical (and feminist) reconstructions of a literary text. This chapter will consider the obstacles represented by fathers in Camila and Miss Mary, by mothers in De eso no se habla, and by priests in Camila and De eso no se habla.

Camila's father is Federal supporter of the dictator Rosas; he is an authoritarian father and husband and imprisons his own mother (for a treasonable affair with the Royalist Viceroy) in his house; he is active in the pursuit of his daughter after her elopement, and refuses his entire family's appeals that he beg Rosas for clemency when it is learned that Camila as well as Ladislao will be executed.⁶ Even before the credits for Camila have ended, there is a sequence in which the father's distance yet cruelty are powerfully prefigured. It begins with the father in red waistcoat moving into a doorframe, blocking the source of light that had illuminated Camila in the left side of the frame. He has discovered Camila protecting some kittens. The last shot of the sequence shows a bundle being

⁶ As Héctor Alterio was one of those actors forced into exile during the early years of the Dirty War, his role of father as dictator has ironic impact.

thrown to the sea, over which image is written the dedication: 'To the memory of Camila O'Gorman and Ladislao Gutiérrez.' The mewing of the cats carries over to a shot of virginally-white communicants at confession, so that Camila's destruction by the father and the Church is prefigured.

Likewise in Miss Mary the father is immediately associated with terror, by being associated with the dictator Uriburu. The audience is informed from the start who Uriburu is. Miss Mary opens with a script - white on black:

On September 6th, 1930, in Argentina, an ultra-right military coup led by General Uriburu, overthrew the democratic government of President Irigoyen.

The Argentine upper classes, economically and culturally influenced by the British Empire wholeheartedly supported this breach of constitutional rule.

Through fraud and repression the conservative party remained in power for fifteen years.

After forty seconds, the first scene of Miss Mary begins. Geoffrey Kantaris (2000) has analysed this scene in detail: The textual overlay informs us that it is 'Buenos Aires, 1930.' We see a mock Tudor house, from where emanates a chilling sound of a woman intoning, in English, 'In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost,' echoed by childish voices. For the conclusion of this prayer, the camera cuts to the girls' bedroom. It pans from the window, across the stiff profile of the governess, to rest on a closing take of two small girls, back

to back, and kneeling by their respective beds, praying. The governess is occluding the light from the window on the right. On the left of the screen a door opens and a woman (the children's mother) enters. She represses their enthusiastic welcome (they rush up to her) by her injunction to 'mind my hair.' The father (Eduardo Pavlovsky) then appears (occluding all light) in the doorway behind her, who further cuts short all show of affection by commanding, 'Come on, we'll be late.' As he announces, 'We're going to celebrate Uriburu's triumph,' the wider political context of dictatorship is associated with the tyranny of the father. That the familial (patriarchal) repression extends to the sexual (we have seen the governess tying the children's hands into the sleeves of their nightgowns), is now rendered complete by the mother's, 'Mind you look under the bed,' which the children duly do.

Now the credits begin across the documentary backdrop of Uriburu's takeover and attendant celebrations, before the protagonist's narrative begins in a scene where she ponders, 'Perhaps you should have gone to India, Miss Mary. At least it's clear there who the natives are.' Thus this racist and repressed woman will focus the ideological import of the film: that familial repression is the kernel of the wider, interrelated repressions of the Argentine upper classes, and that it is intimately tied up with patriarchal, through sexual, control. This control espouses the mixed values that insist that Johnny, at age fifteen, become a man, whilst Miss Mary protect the 'emminently suitable (marriageable) condition' of the girls in her charge. In the next sequence of the film (in which Miss Mary is 'welcomed' to the house), the father, again positioned against, and darkening, a window, states that the governess must be Catholic, and the insinuation why is

clear when he underscores the 'danger' that men represent to women by commending the 'lovely blue colour' of her eyes.

If Miss Mary is complicit with patriarchy's restrictions, Doña Leonor embodies them. When Charlotte's mother is caricatured as the dictator she is taking on patriarchy's repressive mantle. The grave the film often shows her tending (as if to make his death sure) is her husband's. Thus, it is as guardian to Charlotte that she constitutes an obstacle. One scene (in which Charlotte acts out the role of Carmen) will exemplify this. This scene shows how Charlotte's creativity is quashed by her mother. Nevertheless, Charlotte's creativity is only temporarily halted by its obstacle. The scene begins with a mid-distance shot of Charlotte from the waist upwards smiling at herself in a three-way mirror. When the soundtrack of Carmen (Georges Bizet, 1875) begins, the camera pulls back to show Charlotte in full length, dressed up as Carmen. She twirls twice in the mirror. Suddenly, the music and Charlotte's movement to it is halted. Her mother has turned off the gramophone. The camera follows Doña Leonor into the adjoining room where we hear that the gramophone (and presumably Charlotte's dancing) has resumed. Nevertheless, despite (in her resumed dancing) Charlotte's defiance of her mother's proscriptions, the repressive power of her mother goes beyond her switching off of the gramophone, having extended to the way in which we have been made to look at Charlotte. Although at the scene's beginning we think we are looking at Charlotte in her own point-of-view (reflected in the mirror into which she gazes), as the camera pulls back and reveals more of her, it becomes clear that she is being watched from some distance behind. (The first cut eventually reveals that it is from her mother's

point-of-view in the doorway that we are looking.) Thus the narrative repression is reinforced by the film's evocation, through the gaze, of the mother's subjective repression and power.

At the same time (as the analysis in Section B below will suggest) this representation of the mother is nuanced by her solidarity with Charlotte. Similarly, there is in Bemberg's representation of fathers the possibility of mitigation. In *Camila*, the possibility of the father's tenderness is intimated (an intimation made strong through lighting) in a scene (of one shot only) in which Camila learns of her grandmother's death. This scene opens with Camila, entering the hallway of the house and receiving the news from her maid. As the camera and Camila move towards the right and from the hallway through an open doorway into the room where her father sits silently grieving, the light changes from natural sunlight to muted shadows. As Camila moves closer towards her father (so that he is framed in the centre of the screen), one diegetic shaft of light from a window behind him is brought into view and irradiates a small spot to his right. Camila moves into it so that it haloes her. Following her head as it moves down to her father's lap the camera also moves down this shaft of white light. As it does so, the light and camera pick out the white of her father's arm.

The hand with which he comforts Camila's head is now irradiated and (as the camera moves up to frame it) the side of his face is illuminated. Fig.5.1 was one of the publicity photographs for the film.⁷ However, in the film itself the image

⁷ The original photograph, which unfortunately I could not access, would have been in the film's rich colours.

is cropped, thereby eliminating features of the mise-en-scène other than that of the light. This light, which works to sanctify the scene and moment, is therefore displayed closer-up and marks the sense that the unity of father and daughter is a transcendent moment. Its gravity is underscored by the quietness of the ambient sounds, which are solely of footsteps and rustling clothes.

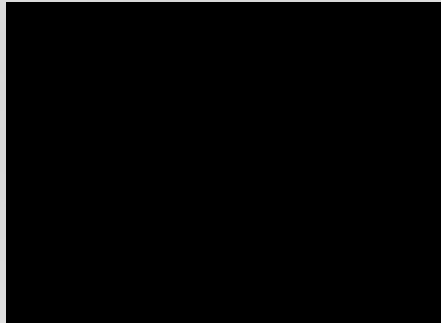


Fig.5.1

That this moment is also ephemeral is intimated in that Camila's redemptive femininity is blocked by her father's masculine power. On the left side of the frame, Camila's lace shawl is picked out against the drab and heavy wood paneling of the door, whilst on the right her father's left arm bars her from the instruments of the intellect which are rendered phallic by his positioning: he is upright like the quills, whilst she is prostrate on his knee. The only other institution allowed access to this intellect (apart from the father) is that of the Church, represented here in the image of a saint, whose frame is further framed by the quills. Thus the father's 'masculine' and prohibitive arm contrasts with his other arm whose white illumination has not only softened it with possibility, but associated it iconographically with Camila's shawl. The possibilities

intimated in this arm are made poignant when we consider that the father in Bemberg's films is most often a silent menace.

However, in Bemberg's last film most men (instead of menacing) are risible. If the father is entirely absent from De eso no se habla (hence nullified), the role and menace of priest is deflated by way of comic ridicule. The priest's deflation (through a woman's sensuality) is established in one of the first scenes in the film. In this scene, Doña Leonor has been called in to the priest's office. He suspects (rightly) that she was responsible for the destruction of Widow Schmidt's ornamental dwarves. The scene itself opens on a view of the priest (Roberto Carnaghi) looking out of his window. He eventually joins Doña Leonor who is sitting at his desk. Doña Leonor's initial absence from the frame underscores an impatience with patriarchal confinements announced by her extra-diegetic, 'I haven't much time father...' When the priest sits down and faces her, a series of cross cutting begins between them. When (in an opening gambit) he informs her that he often prays for her, in

Fig.5.2

she counters mischievously with,

Fig.5.3

Then to his, 'We all know that as a Catholic few men could compare to your late husband,' she deals a double blow

(to the Church and to men). She responds, 'Ah yes, as a Catholic, no-one.' This comic deflation of the priest's institutional role is underscored by the bows of Leonor's hat which, when shot sideways (as she faces the priest), assume the pattern of two arrows poised and ready for flight towards him.

Doña Leonor's body enjoys its own sensuousness and its diminishment of that of the priest. The priest has held his position whilst there is an expansive opening out of Doña Leonor as she delivers the joke. Her facial expressions of enjoyment and mischief and his nervous rubbing of hands and wiping of his head with the handkerchief give accent to the first long take. This is witnessed through a lighting that in a golden hue on her neck and face, highlights her sensuality but shines on and makes more excessive his already profuse sweating corporeality. Furthermore, Leonor's natural, but the priest's repressed, sensuality are comically reinforced by the graphic echoes set up between her bared right arm and the naked flesh of a leg of a statue, behind and to the screen's left of her. With its conflation to a two-dimensional screen this leg is both poised above the priest's head, whilst demonstrably on the wall behind him.

Nevertheless, although the performance of the priest's body makes us laugh (because it is where resides his masculine 'weakness'), the representation of his obstructive institutional power is made forceful in the visual and aural depiction of his space. All the while the church bell intones power, reinforcing an ambiguous critique spelled out in the *mise-en-scène*. The initial long take, with the camera performing an arc around the room, takes in the motif of panels and

of bars that reinforce the geometric lines of a crucifix which will come to separate priest from woman. Dreary and drab tones of whites, blacks, blues and browns predominate. The light colours of the walls make heavy the darkness of the furniture. Bars of light filter through the shutters and radiate onto the back wall. The wings of a large golden angel on this wall pick up and seem to radiate this light even further. But this beautiful image is demeaned by its signification of trapped light. (The voices of the children, emanating extra-diegetically from beyond the barred windows, are similarly trapped.) When eventually the crucifix across the table separates the protagonists within the frame, it is loaded with the weight of its complex symbolism - not only of ecclesiastical prohibition, but of imprisonment.

In Camila, the representation of priests is similarly complex. Ladislao is not only priest, but lover. As lover (Chapter Six will show that) his representation (as one that is vulnerable to a female gaze) is sympathetic. Nevertheless, as lover he finds that he cannot leave behind his allegiance to God as priest. Thus, when the pair is discovered, Ladislao prays rather than chooses to run further. For this, Camila (as well as himself) is caught, jailed and executed. There are strong suggestions (as well as in the sequence of execution itself) that the film does not forgive Ladislao his action of putting his ecclesiastical role first. One sequence, when Camila and her family are going to church, will exemplify this. They (and the camera) are stopped short by the sight of severed heads (one of which is that of Camila's bookseller, Mariano) placed on the church walls as warning. The next cut frames Ladislao beside another priest in a positioning that makes clear his institutional allegiance. Camila asks him why they leave

Mariano up there. Ladislao has no answer. This abdication of response is rendered shameful against the voice of outrage expressed by the bookseller's grieving mother. She cries, 'Asesinos' (in an accusation evocative of that of the mothers of the 'disappeared') four times. The final cry provides a sound edit to the sequence of the new priest's reactive sermon.⁸ Although the substance of Ladislao's sermon will defy the religious and social expectations of his role, iconographically he will remain identified with the Church's institutional obstructive power and moral weakness:

The first sound is of Ladislao's voice demanding extra-diegetically, 'What happened the other night in the house of God?' The camera fixes this query upon Camila's father (whose face is held in close-up for three seconds), before, in answer, moving across to a mid-length portrait of the dictator Rosas. What happened was countenanced by the Father, sanctioned by the State and sanctified by 'God.' Nevertheless, whilst Ladislao's voice holds the scene together extra-diegetically, his audience is made more important, visually. This audience is composed of both Rosas' supporters, and the women, prominent amongst whom are Camila's father and Camila, respectively. The brighter lighting on them picks out the predominant reds of the badges of the dictator Rosas on their lapels on the one hand, and the sorrowful faces of the women on the other. Moreover priest and audience are never in the frame at the same time. In the longest shot of the sequence the camera pans from left to right across the audience before leaving them to take in altar and retablo for five seconds. During this process extra lighting is thrown onto the lighter yellow tones of the

⁸ It is a sermon that speaks to the Dirty War 'Asesinos' too, and to Bemberg's contemporary post-dictatorship audience.

altar. When, finally, the camera comes to rest on Ladislao, a blander lighting identifies him with the altar, both suggesting his own weakness and setting him apart from his audience. At the same time, the change in lighting highlights that it is the altar that divides priest from audience. Thus the separation from his audience is ambiguous. It reinforces the content of Ladislao's sermon against the edicts of Rosas and thus against Rosas' supporters, but it also works to separate him in his role of priest from the more sympathetic women, including Camila.

All of the patriarchal obstacles analysed above have necessitated the feminist message in Bemberg's films. Obstacles not only show the need for transgression but they highlight its courage and defiance. For a transgression, an obstacle is needed.

B. Solidarity

Nevertheless, women have each other in Bemberg's films. This care between Bemberg's women informs the director's treatment of her films. Whilst Miss Mary shows women alienated from each other, Barbara Quart (1989, 254) notes that what 'stays with one most is the extent to which the film cares about the women characters, from the malaise of the neglected mother ... to the two daughters of privilege, whose futures are blighted, historical figures caught in women's traps.' The solidarity of women within the films (and to a lesser degree its reverse - women's betrayal of their solidarity) is an important theme. Here (and given that, with the exceptions of Leonora, Camila and Charlotte,

Bemberg's protagonists are older women) Bemberg is in line with her contemporary women directors of whom Quart (1989, 4) suggests that they change the representation of older women from 'sexless loving, or unloving mothers; or vampirish threats,' and define them 'principally as persons, friends, professional people.' Even Bemberg's first film, Momentos, which presents the heroine's alienations, has a moment (when Nicolás first kisses Lucía in his own house) that hints at her solidarity with other women. During this scene, Nicolás' wife, Mónica, is on the telephone. Catherine Grant (2000, 87) suggests that the off-screen sounds of Mónica's 'reedy voice' and the rambling nature of her conversation 'leave us in no doubt that Nicolás is justified in his desire for the older, more sophisticated Lucía.' Nevertheless, Lucía asks where Mónica is. The film, I posit, makes clear that Lucía (rather than Nicolás) cares about his infidelity.

Bemberg's next film, Señora de Nadie, foregrounds the solidarity between women. The film establishes early on that it is the husband (and not the mistress) that is Leonora's traitor. This is unusual: Lucy Fischer (1989, 216-249) compares confrontations between two women (over a man) in George Cukor's Rich and Famous (USA, 1981) and Claudia Weill's Girlfriends (USA, 1978). That Cukor's women engage in a shrewish fight is, Fischer suggests, a male fantasy, common to many male-directed films, of female confrontation. Girlfriends, she argues, mediates sexual jealousy between women more subtly. In Bemberg's hands, however, there is no question of sexual jealousy in the meeting of wife and mistress. It is clear that the women, in their different ways, can engage with each other. Furthermore, the first meeting between wife and

mistress not only deflects what in more sexist renderings would be staged as a confrontation (if not a 'catfight') but deals in the process of Leonora's development.⁹ This meeting occurs seven minutes into the film and is one in which Leonora challenges the mistress (Susu Pecoraro) in the antiques shop in which she is working. Leonora has just discovered her husband and this woman kissing each other goodbye. The two women face each other in three mini sequences: once in the middle of the shop, once in cross-cutting across the desk, and once as Leonora is leaving and Pecoraro enters the space of the shop again to try to detain her. In the cross cutting there are point-of-view shots between the women. These allow subjectivity to both women and a confident holding of the look. The confident shamelessness of the mistress' look is, eventually, converted into a shamed look askance by the even more assured questioning of the wife's gaze. Thus the former's looking away is informed by a kind of sensitivity (not quite embarrassment), suggesting a decency of feeling for this other woman.

In all three of these encounters, Leonora stares Pecoraro out. The wife can hold the mistress with her gaze, and she shows agency and a seriousness of intent in insisting on an answer to her original, 'When did all this begin?' with a harsh, 'Please, when did all this begin?' Therefore, whilst the youth of the Luisina Brando reinforces a sense of her character's naiveté and clumsiness, it simultaneously points up the sense of strength of character in one so young. Nevertheless, Leonora's defiance is tempered by comedy and the strength of her

⁹ This scene is prefaced by a cameo scene that suggests tenderness and trust between women. In the marital home Leonora sits down on the arm of the chair in which an elderly woman (her mother-in-law, we suppose), is ensconced. Their positioning, gestures and smiles reinforce the composition's suggestions of their physical and emotional closeness.

brave challenge is undercut at the scene's end by the ambient tinkling of the doorbells as she leaves. The result is a scene that delights in an ambiguity that refuses judgement of either woman. Even the most touching moments verge on comedy. When Leonora first enters the shop, Pecoraro puts her bared leg up against the desk, incongruously in a shop of this nature. The point is reinforced that Pecoraro is oblivious to her customers, as well as to the nature of this one. The revelation of Leonora's identity as wife is also comic. She gives Pecoraro her husband's card, not in a hateful, albeit an uncompromising way. The comic incongruity of their conduct (as well as their solidarity) towards each other is continued after Leonora has revealed herself to be the wife of this woman's lover. The mistress responds by offering her a coffee.

Visual as well as narrative incongruities abound. The starkness of the bright scarlet dress of the mistress is set against the sober pale colours of the wife. Such costuming is highlighted by the *mise-en-scène* of antiques shop (suggesting decadently its lavishness and incongruously its middle-class respectability) that frames them. Thus, after their meeting has been established, the close-up cross cutting between Leonora, who is framed by somber colors (Fig.5.5), and Pecoraro (Fig.5.4), who is framed lusciously by swirling wallpaper, is comic reinforcement of their respective sexual roles as obedient, naive wife and brazen hussy:

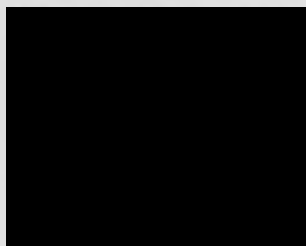


Fig.5.4

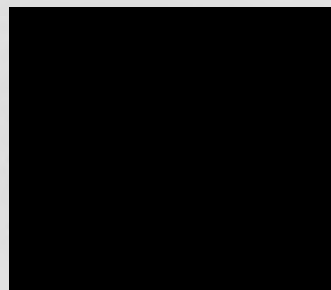


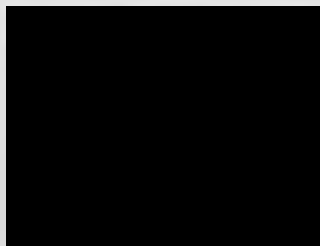
Fig.5.5.

Always the quality of their respective gazes is read against their respective framing mise-en-scènes. Thus the gravity of one image and the comedy of the other mediate a meeting that is closer to tender than confrontational. Our laughter here is apt emotional response to the lack of blame that the women have for each other, and to the indications of the unimportance of the husband as a competition between them. Pecoraro says, 'Fernando is no more than a friend to me' and Leonora counters, 'To me he's a traitor.' Wife and mistress find themselves identified.

The intimacy between women extends to other 'marginal' people in Bemberg's films. In De eso no se habla Charlotte shows solidarity with Mohamé, another outsider in the film. Like Charlotte, he is one who eventually dares to be different, and is therefore one of those to whom the film is dedicated. Their close association is made clear at the scene of Charlotte's piano recital. It is he who comforts the anxious Doña Leonor that she must have faith in Charlotte.

Protected by the curtains from the gaze of the diegetic audience, he kisses Charlotte tenderly on her head, and moved by her courage, wipes away a tear. In another scene, Charlotte herself points out Mohamé's own 'difference': their identification as outsiders is underlined in that it occurs whilst d'Andrea, another outsider from faraway places, is telling his exotic tales. Here (although he crawls to the edge of the lighted halo in which d'Andrea is entertaining Charlotte with his stories), Mohamé denies his identity as 'Mohamed Ben Ali,' laying claim to the Spanish 'Mohamé,' despite Charlotte's protests that he is Arabic. Nevertheless, he reveals his identity as narrator of the story at the film's end and names himself in celebration as 'I, Mohamed Ben Ali.' He has thus learned from Charlotte and her final courage. Although he will be left alone by it, Mohamé is the only recognizable character who demonstrates joy at Charlotte's parade with the circus. The final shot of this parade centres Mohamé, now alone in the crowd, but identified (by his gaze after her) with

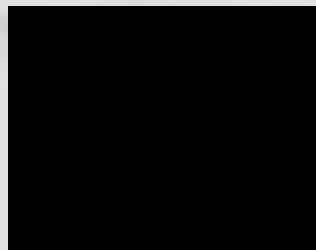
Charlotte: **Fig.5.6**



Such identification is

reinforced by Charlotte's reciprocal gaze as well as by her 'Turkish' fez:

Fig.5.7



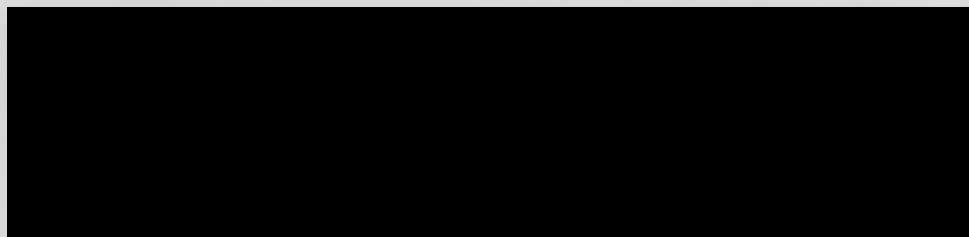
As there are obstacles to women's friendships with each other, in some of Bemberg's films there are obstacles to women's friendships with other 'marginal' people. Juana in *Yo, la peor de todas* is identified with a 'marginal' man. This is Sigüenza (expelled from the Jesuits for 'licentious behaviour'), a poet of note, hence Juana's intellectual equal. Juana says of Sigüenza that he is 'My great friend.' The example of Sigüenza exemplifies how against women's solidarities are pitted patriarchal obstacles. In this film, the patriarchal institution of God is enemy. Thus, when Juana (defeated by the powers of the Church) finally 'renounces' Sigüenza during a private audience, the ecclesiastical grille that separates them is foregrounded in all cross-cut shots between them. Significantly, the narrative content of this sequence is about the death of friends. Sigüenza has come to tell her of the viceroy's death in Spain. Juana says, 'Every time a friend dies it's as if I can't breathe. Even with you it's hard to talk.' Sigüenza twice asks her, 'What happened, Juana?' But she dismisses him by saying, 'You risk being infected (by the plague). Goodbye, my great friend.' One of the shots preceding their meeting has shown Juana in a cell divested of her possessions. In this shot equivalence is made between her on the left side, and the crucifix on the wall on the right side, of the frame, in that both their whitenesses are picked out by the light in the surrounding darkness. There is a sense therefore, that in what she is about to do (renounce her friendship with Sigüenza), she is martyring herself to the church's dictates. When she says goodbye, we see her in extreme close-up. The direct look with which she holds her friend is full of sorrow. The camera cuts to, and remains on, his dejected face for two seconds.

That the end of her friendships is the end of all hope for Juana is underlined by the next two cuts: to her dreary cell, and then to a shot on the face of her confessor, Miranda, who is gloating with, 'I've waited twenty years for this, Juana.' In this scene of shot/countershot Miranda delivers Juana's list of penances. Miranda - higher in the frame and shot (as well as lit) from below - counters Juana's, 'I felt closer to God (when I loved the vicereine)' with, 'God wants another Juana from the one who loved too much.' The Church has thus proscribed Juana's love (and solidarity) with other women. Furthermore, in that Juana's visit to Miranda follows her renunciation of Sigüenza, is reinforced the idea that Sigüenza is one of the things that (having loved too much) 'God' is asking her to renounce.

Thus the theme of women's solidarity (with each other and with other 'marginal' people) cannot be separated from that of men as obstacles to the protagonist's goals. In all of Bemberg's films, men are a threat to women's solidarity. This is graphically captured in a scene towards the end of Yo, la peor de todas as the shades are darkening around Juana. Juana is called to her sick friend's bedside to be warned of her betrayal by The Bishop of Puebla who has published her diatribe against Vieyra against her permission. The closer framing (effected in the sequencing of shots represented in Figs.5.8 to 5.10) connotes an extreme fear ('There is danger in this,' the elder nun is warning Juana) that is somewhat mitigated by the depiction of the nuns' extreme closeness to each other. The context of Juana's betrayal by Puebla informs our reading of this closeness as threatened, however. Thus the tight framing of the pair effects a sense as much of the forces hemming them in, as of their intimacy:

**Fig.5.8****Fig.5.9****Fig.5.10.**

Ironically, one of the most forceful obstacles to women's solidarities is represented in the figure of the mother, Doña Leonor, in De eso no se habla. Here her repressions are paradoxical not least in that between mother and daughter is an unusual solidarity, a moving intimacy. Nevertheless, this intimacy is one which of itself is an obstacle. Indeed, the solidarity between mother and daughter is bound up in the mother's repressions. Such complexities of their solidarity are exemplified in the sequence in which Doña Leonor mistakes d'Andrea's intentions. She believes when she goes to meet him that he will offer her his hand, and before leaving asks her daughter for advice. Charlotte is delighted that her mother will not be lonely on that day 'when I'm not here.' She does not mean the eventual separation by death construed in Doña Leonor's, 'But I'll be the first to go.' The tenderness between them is continued into a scene where (having finally been proposed to by d'Andrea) Charlotte tells her mother she has accepted him:

**Fig.5.11****Fig.5.12****Fig.5.13.**

Charlotte has instigated her mother's kiss (Fig.5.13) by causing her mother who is close to tears, to laugh (Fig.5.12). Charlotte has answered (in Fig.5.11) the question, 'Are you happy?' with 'I think so. But happiness isn't everything.' Thus as with Señora de Nadie this solidarity is made more poignant, by being made funny. Furthermore, this poignancy derives from the fact that the mother's repressions of her daughter stem from her fear of losing her. Doña Leonor's scheming soon resumes, however. She says,

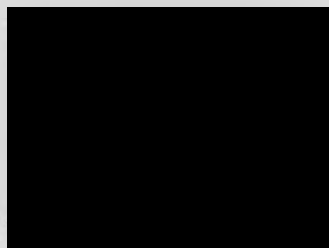


Fig.5.14 before across this image of her cunning a bell tolls like a death knell. Thus in her closeness to her, Doña Leonor is both Charlotte's death and life.

Although the relationship between mother and daughter is complex in De eso no se habla, Doña Leonor is nevertheless representative of those (few) women that thwart each other in Bemberg's films. She and they are criticized for it precisely because solidarity between women is such an important theme in Bemberg's films. The traps in which Quart has identified the sisters in Miss Mary as caught (and by which their solidarity is blocked), are strengthened by the complicity of their mother and of Miss Mary. Thereby the individual alienations of complicit women are also made clear. Whilst Miss Mary may eventually be banished, the mother has always chosen (in response to her daily estrangement from her husband and to his infidelities) solitary confinement in her crying room, rather than the support of other women. Pointedly, it is the mother (and not the father)

who, far from unified with Miss Mary, dismisses her. Thus the figure of Doña Leonor (in her love for Charlotte, a dwarf) encapsulates all ideas concerning solidarity that all of the preceding films have worked through: women must stick together, and stick with a wider community of 'marginal' people. As such, they are threat to, and hence threatened by, men. When women break that trust, the films render them complicit with the repressions of patriarchy against their own kind.

C. Love

Bemberg's films highlight women's solidarity against men over the subject of love. Her protagonists are especially identified with other women when they are identified with love. In Camila it is the mother who pleads for her daughter's life. She intimates that her position is close to that of Camila's on love when she says that 'marriage is the jail you cannot see.' Chapter Six's examination of a *mise-en-scène* of femininity will discuss the particular 'femininity' of an early scene in Camila in which the protagonist is visited by several women during siesta and told of her sister's engagement. The engaged girl expresses her delight with 'I'm engaged, I'm engaged!' Of interest to this chapter's discussions is that in this scene the context of shared girlish joy at getting married gives rise to Camila's disquisition on the importance of love, for she suspects (rightly) that her sister is getting married for wealth. During Camila's lecture her eyes are full of tears. Although the tears speak a love for Ladislao (that cannot be named), she is sharing love's emotions with her friends.

In Miss Mary, women's alienations from each other are nuanced by the fact that Carolina shows great solidarity with her sister on the subject of love. Her protests at her sister's shotgun wedding because 'She (Teresa) doesn't love him' are brave indeed in the face of her father whose chilling power the film has inscribed from the start. Carolina's refusal to attend by locking herself in her room is staged as directly transgressive of her father's prescriptions when he bangs on the door in a temporary but violent loss of temper.¹⁰ Thus love (like that of women's solidarities) is seen as defiance of the Father as Patriarch in all of Bemberg's films. In Camila there is a scene, at the family dinner table (the scene following Ladislao's transgressive sermon), in which Camila speaks out her identification with Ladislao against the repressive power - directing both narrative and mise-en-scène - of her father. The scene opens with the camera panning around a dinner table to enumerate eight participants in the scene. At one end of the table the camera moves across the back of Camila's father, which then dominates the frame. The next shot accommodates Camila's back next to her father's. The commanding line of view down the table is from his (not her) position. We glimpse the mother at the other end and therefore facing him. Off-screen someone praises the order established by Rosas' rule. The voice of Camila interjects, 'Yes, but at what price?' Everyone is silenced. The only sounds (apart from those of the dialogue) are the quiet ambient ones of cutlery on plates - which in their suggestion of unnatural restraint, are aural evocation of social repression.

¹⁰ In a previous scene, Johnny has told Miss Mary that over Teresa's indiscretions his father was not angry, 'He never gets angry - he doesn't have to.' Thus, when, now, her father loses his temper with Carolina, we are made to register the seriousness of her transgression over the subject of her sister's love.

That Camila has just violated strict hierarchical codes is underlined by the fact that her father sends out the servants before, as he commands, Camila can repeat what she has said. She continues: 'Nothing justifies violence. All my life I've heard the same thing.' She demands to know why Mariano was killed and answers her own question with, 'Selling books.' One of the guests jokes that she is defending her confessor, Ladislao. Her admission of this (her justification that there is nothing wrong in defending someone on the side of life) articulates not only a political position, but her love. At this point her father tells her that here no-one raises their voice, and she is instructed to leave.¹¹ Camila has just flouted her father's prerogative, which is to direct and speak his daughters' desires. Camila's speaking out preludes the ultimate transgression of the father's rule - her action of elopement. The dictator Rosas' violent punishment of this is prefigured in that sequence in which - bloodily cutting out a cow's uterus - Camila's father is informed of it.

Nevertheless, although the obstacles to love are real indeed, Camila circumvents them (in that she enjoys her lover even if she is murdered for it). Conversely, Miss Mary's failure is her failure to love. Miss Mary is obliged to remember what she struggles to repress: her night of passion with her fifteen-year-old charge, Johnny. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the end of the film thwarts the implication of its own momentum (aided not least by the fact that the love scene occurs towards the film's end), which is that it is heading towards Miss Mary's freedom. Perón is released at the end of the film and Miss Mary is by now an independent teacher working in Buenos Aires, but the final images (she

¹¹ Camila has not raised her voice, but she has broken the silence imposed upon women. This is intolerable to the father as it is intolerable to the ruling élite of 1980s' Argentina. Any such

closes the shutters on the celebrants in the streets) are those of a woman who cannot face up to her liberty. This chapter's analysis of the lighting of her love scene with Johnny will reveal that although Miss Mary cannot help but remember, she remains true to not wanting to. In this scene, Miss Mary's memory of her transgression structures a struggle between shots of bright and washed-out colour. Furthermore, silences predominate, making the use of colour more striking. The scene (comprising nineteen shots) is preceded by that of Johnny's visit to the prostitute. On his return, headlights draw up into a darkened frame. He enters Miss Mary's bedroom. She puts on a light, gets out of bed, puts on her dressing gown and dries his back. He twice says he loves her, she tries to ignore him, he turns around and they kiss.¹²

The scene opens with a darkened mid-close-up shot of Miss Mary in bed. A faint yellow light passes from left to right of the frame. A door has been opened. After a brief cut to Johnny shadowed in the frame of the doorway, we cut back to Miss Mary as she puts on the bedside light - to the right of the frame. Miss Mary is then irradiated (in Johnny's point of view) in the warm ambient light of this bedside lamp:

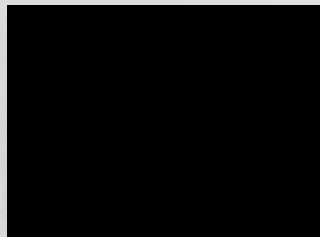


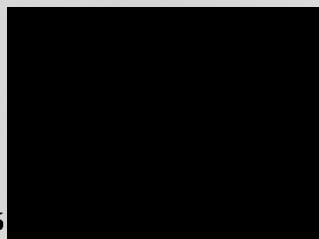
Fig.5.15

This warmth of colour continues through

transgressions are required to leave the frame.

¹² Constantly in the background to this scene we hear birdsong. This reinforces the silence both of the early morning and of the intimacy which neither Johnny nor Miss Mary hardly dare articulate. At first Johnny is inarticulate and Miss Mary assumes the voice - and role - of governess. In shot fourteen, Johnny mumbles, 'I love you.' In shot fifteen he says it again, clearer this time, and she responds, 'Be quiet please.' From then on, silence predominates.

the next eleven shots that cut between woman and boy. On the cut, however, to



shot thirteen, Fig.5.16 edited on Johnny's movement around anti-clockwise (he is following her command to turn around so that he cannot see her get out of bed), and towards us,

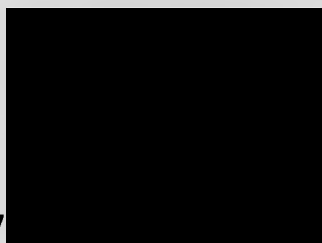


Fig.5.17 the light of the screen darkens. This shot works as the prelude to their lovemaking: Miss Mary has finally agreed to dry his back, like a child.¹³ This prelude follows her command that in effect has meant that she has appraised him whilst he has not looked at her. Therefore such abrupt and marked bleaching of colour suggests Miss Mary's present attempt (as she is forced to remember) to wash her visions away.¹⁴

If lighting marks her attempt to erase the memory of it, positioning marks Miss Mary's wish to abdicate from the scene. At the shot's beginning, on Johnny's turn around, he is in the left foreground, and Miss Mary is on the edge of the right background, of the frame. She then moves out of the frame's edge before once she has put on her dressing gown - moving back into it and towards the frontal plane of the screen that Johnny occupies. Miss Mary tries not to look at

¹³ Nevertheless, she says, 'You could do this yourself. You're not a boy anymore. You don't need help.'

his back (as she rubs it) by looking down. Lighting, however, actually marks Miss Mary's failure of self-repression. When finally we move into the shot/countershot sequences (made possible by Johnny's turn to face her so that he can caress her face), all point-of-view shots of him are now even brighter than Johnny's of her. As she kisses him, so her memory of this moment erupts, so that from shot fourteen onwards the light of all shots remains bright and golden (articulating that female desire already examined in Chapter Two). The scene is closed and framed by a mid close up of Johnny's mother whispering on the phone, in faded light. We return to the cool aesthetic of the film. Miss Mary returns to her denials.

In absolute contrast to Miss Mary, when Camila does eventually name her love, she first does so (in outright defiance of patriarchy's institutions) in the confessional box. In this scene of shot/countershot, Camila speaks her love through the grille in a direct look out at the camera, and therefore at Ladislao:

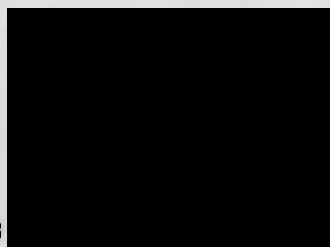


Fig.5.18

Framed in an iris (which shape

underlines her eyes' stare), lips and eyes are highlighted and centred. Thus as Camila speaks her love through both look (eyes) and word (lips), the shot's imagery speaks, respectively, the sensual nature of that love's visual and sexual apprehensions. Whilst a closer discussion of the articulation of such desires is reserved to Chapter Six, what has been seen here (especially in Camila's gaze) is

¹⁴ This 'bleaching' technique is used to similar effect in another scene (that of the peasants'

that love is not so much a theme in Bemberg's films, as a transgressive action. Camila's look is so unbearably defiant (and transgressive) that the priest cannot take it, and all shots of him show him looking abjectly downwards.

Conclusion

We have seen in Bemberg's protagonists a quest - for sexual and then intellectual development. In their journey Bemberg's protagonists encounter men (and some women) who in their institutional roles are obstacles. What do women do against men? They speak their desires, and in so doing, nullify husbands, defy fathers, and deflate priests. At the same time, they find support in a community with each other, and with other 'marginal' people. Hence they are made agents of the free expression of sexual love and of female solidarity. In all of these respects Bemberg's films deal with but go much further than those contemporary mainstream 'women's' films of which Christine Geraghty (1986, 45) talks that privilege the problem of women's relationships with men, the importance of friendships between women, and the difficulties of combining these things with a job.¹⁵

During the quest of Bemberg's protagonist, the motif of window (Chapter Two has shown) has assumed large importance. Intimating the breaking out of some sort, the window represents both barrier to, and passage on, a journey.

Nevertheless, earlier comparative analysis of the 'autobiographical' Momentos and Señora de Nadie with Miss Mary has suggested that the trajectory from

wedding, which will be discussed in Chapter Six).

¹⁵ Geraghty (1986) discusses three films about women (mostly by men): Girlfriends (USA, Claudia Weill, 1978), An Unmarried Woman (USA, Paul Mazursky, 1977), and Coma (USA, Michael Chrichton, 1978).

trapped to free protagonist has not run either straight or smooth. The move beyond the window has been into an exterior, active, and traditionally 'male' space, and for trespassing into which, both Camila and Sor Juana were actually severely punished. Furthermore, the obstacles Bemberg's protagonist must resist and the boundaries she must transgress become redefined during her journey beyond the window. They begin within the family - as husbands - but beyond the family continue as social and ecclesiastical boundaries. At the same time, although the heroine's transgressions widen beyond the sexual (Lucía and Camila), to those of establishing an economic and intellectual autonomy (Leonora and Charlotte, and Juana and Charlotte, respectively), the patriarchal nature (even of the mother in *De eso no se habla*) of all obstacles continues.

All the themes of patriarchal obstacles, solidarity and love imbricate each other, and are used by Bemberg to make feminist points. Patriarchal obstacles highlight the feminist transgressive need and courage. The protagonist's courage is geared towards speaking her desires. In that the protagonist acts and speaks her desires, the theme of love points up women's agency. Even Miss Mary's night with Johnny has illustrated that when they are lovers, Bemberg's women are active. Finally, women's solidarity was important to Bemberg's formation as a feminist. Women must support each other and other 'marginal' people. When we consider the identification of women with those other 'marginal' people in Bemberg's films, such as Leonora, Juana and Charlotte, with the gay Pablo, the homosexual Sigüenza, and the Arab Mohamé, respectively, then the fact that Bemberg's final heroine is a dwarf should not come as any surprise.

Charlotte, is finally free. Her journey beyond the confines of the town and through the Argentine pampas, with the last images of the film presenting an ever-unfolding horizon, represents possibility for women in the new democratic Argentina.¹⁶ The space beyond the window is not only limitless with possibility, but has room for all women, from bourgeois urban housewife to small-town dwarf. If the first part of this thesis saw Bemberg challenging Camila's historical representation as the seduced (hence victimized) woman, and - before the final scenes of Juana's downfall - stressing Juana's defiance, it remains true that intrinsically-strong women really were crushed (in Argentina and in Mexico) by the institutional power of men. Perhaps it is in compensation that Bemberg's (fictional) Charlotte speaks up so 'loudly' against her obliteration.

¹⁶ Such a contention forms the basis of Kathleen Newmann's (2000) discussion of this film.

CHAPTER SIX

Her Gaze, Her Difference and Her Desire: Later Feminist Film Theory and Resistant Voices in Bemberg's Mise-en-Scène of Femininity.

Introduction

The previous chapter considered the transgressive actions of Bemberg's heroine. It was concerned with that earlier feminist film theory that analysed women's representation in narrative. Sometimes it was unable to disentangle the obstacles the heroines confront - in the shapes of father, priest (and one mother) - from their control of the gaze and of their spaces within the frame. It thus foreshadowed this chapter's fuller discussion of the gaze, which begins this thesis' examination of Bemberg's mise-en-scène of femininity. In Bemberg's films (the later films especially) an opulent mise-en-scène frames the female leads whose sensuality is put on display and celebrated. This blatant display of her protagonist appears to be unique in a filmmaker formed by the second wave of North American and European feminism.¹ In contradistinction to her uses of narrative, it also makes Bemberg a director for whom no existing feminist film

¹ Bemberg's contemporary Argentine women feature filmmakers, Jeanine Meerapfel and Lita Stantic, employ women who are slightly less glamorous. Although (in contrast to Bemberg's later films) Meerapfel's and Stantic's films deal in contemporary time, the comparisons are pointed in that Stantic was Bemberg's producer, and in that Bemberg and Meerapfel share in Beda Docampo Feijoo and Juan Bautista Stagnaro a team of original storywriters. Nevertheless, that all these filmmakers use international stars - Liv Ullmann in Meerapfel's *La amiga/The Girlfriend* and Vanessa Redgrave and Ofelia Medina in Stantic's *A Wall of Silence* (1994) - both highlights an intention to market their films wider afield than just Argentina and the price as well as advantage of co-production money: For *A Wall of Silence* the Mexicans gave Stantic printing/editing facilities, but a 'star' that Stantic spent much of her time telling not to cry. Medina (acting within her own national performance tradition) was 'threatening' to turn Stantic's Argentine film into a Mexican melodrama. (I am grateful to John King for this anecdote.)

theory quite fits. Before analysis can throw light on the question how Bemberg is not objectifying her women to a voyeuristic gaze, it is necessary to sketch the feminist theoretical debates covering the gaze. Feminist film theory has been dominated from the 1970s onwards with questions of the gaze and desire - its involvement of the spectator, and at what and how s/he is looking. This chapter therefore takes as its theoretical starting point Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), dealing as it does in questions of the display of women, the gaze and visual pleasure, and of the later feminist film theory, such as that of Teresa de Lauretis (1984), Mary Ann Doane (1987), Tania Modelski (1988), Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1990), Judith Mayne (1990) and Jackie Stacey (1988 and 1994) which builds on and questions Mulvey's thesis.

The sense that there is ideology at the level of the shot began with André Bazin who (in 1971) called for photographic techniques that would fracture the singular voice of truth that he noted, despite its distorting possibilities, in cinema's depiction of space. This, he said, was similar to the single perspective of Renaissance art in which the viewer is discouraged from working to create her/his own meaning and is always passive. Colin McCabe (1974, 10) critiques the implications of such ideology further by suggesting that the visual silences other voices. From these two arguments feminist film theoreticians have argued that the orchestration of the gaze is one of those ways whereby a singular visual meaning has obviated other ways (both plural visual and verbal) of apprehending woman on the screen.

All of this theory - based on psychoanalytical, notably Freudian, models - agrees that the erotic power of the look is built into the cinematic apparatus that 'is designed to produce and maintain a fascinating hold on the spectator by mobilising pleasure (the unconscious desire of the subject) through interlocking systems of narrativity, continuity, point of view, and identification' (Flitterman Lewis 1990, 3). Point of view and identification implicate the spectator in that cinema turns on the series of looks between that of the camera (the profilmic), the look of the spectator (at the screen) and the intra-diegetic look of characters (at each other, at objects etc.).

In classic narrative cinema, it is argued, the spectator can identify with the masculine male look only, because the camera films from the optical as well as the libidinal point-of-view of the male character.² Thus to feminist film analysts, the ideology at the level of the shot involves not only sexual placing, but the sexual apprehension of woman's 'to-be-looked-at-ness,' in Mulvey's famous phrase. Their theories furthermore posit that because we are looking from this male point of view, at women, the latter remind us of the threat of castration. Classic cinema works to solve the threat of castration in two ways: in narrative structure and in fetishism. The narrative structure finds the woman guilty, and she must either die or be saved, in marriage. The fetishism of her body renders the woman a reassuring object of flawless beauty. Thus Bemberg's feminist films have to do more than just challenge classic narrative.

² Because cinema hinges on pleasure - calling upon scopophilia (the drive of pleasurable looking) - the spectator's gaze involves her sexuality.

The feminist position on the female gaze began with Laura Mulvey's model of a female spectator who - identifying with her passive counterpart on the screen - is rendered passive. In her 'Afterthought' (1981), Mulvey nuanced her view, suggesting an alternative position for the female spectator. Now she argued that an active position could be available to the female spectator if she transsexually identified with the active male hero. Nevertheless, Mulvey is still asserting that for the woman there is a perpetual loss of sexual identity. This loss of sexual identity continued in Mary Ann Doane's (1987) argument that (having only the envy of desire, the desire to desire) the female spectator is disenfranchised from an actively-desiring position. Finally, in both Mulvey's and Doane's analyses, because the female spectator is looking at sexualised images of women, the best form of pleasure for which she can hope is masochistic.

Feminist film theoreticians have challenged Mulvey's and Doane's arguments (much as Bemberg's films, we shall see, challenge the 'men look, women are looked at' paradigm). Lesbian critics suggest that the two positions advocated by Mulvey's afterthought do little to mitigate the repressive binarism inherent in her original analysis of the woman as object and as passive. de Lauretis (1984) advocates multiple and changing positions for the female spectator. In her examination of Hitchcock's films, Tania Modelski (1988) argues that women's bisexuality enables them to identify simultaneously with contradictory points of view.³ Modelski (1988, 27) further asserts that in denying women an active spectator position, feminists have ignored the subversive anger that women in the audience may feel. She uses the analogy of a joke that, even if we do not

like, we can get. In identifying the female spectator's emotions of anger, she suggests that the quality of the gaze has yet to be examined. Jackie Stacey (1988) comes close to a discussion of the emotion with which the (female) look is fraught when she asks what is the place of women's desire towards women, and of the female spectator, within the analysis of narrative cinema? Stacey explores the fascination expressed between women in *All About Eve* (Joseph Mankiewicz, USA, 1950) and in *Desperately Seeking Susan* (Susan Seidelman, USA, 1985). These films - both about the fascination of women across the gap of their differences - suggest that the pleasures of looking between women in a narrative cinema are available to all women (and therefore to those of them who are not necessarily positioned as lesbians) in the audience: 'Both films tempt the woman spectator with the fictional fulfilment of becoming an ideal feminine other, while denying complete transformation by insisting upon differences between women' (Stacey 1988, 129). The following analysis will accordingly exemplify the kinds of pleasure of looking that Bemberg's films (far from denying) allow her female spectator.

There are contentions that woman has been denied more than the gaze, however. Kaja Silverman (1984, 131-149) suggests that 'Within dominant narrative cinema the male subject enjoys not only specular but linguistic authority.' This authority occurs not only within the diegesis (for the male can speak omnisciently, from outside it) to contain the woman: 'The female subject ... is excluded from positions of discursive authority both inside and outside the diegesis; she is confined not only to safe places within the story ... but to the

³ Modelski (1988) cites feminist writings, such as those of Linda Williams (1984 a) and E. Ann Kaplan (1983), which root female bisexuality in the Freudian notion of the young daughter's

safe place of the story.' Silverman further suggests (Ibid, 132) that synchronisation provides the means of that confinement because it effects a smooth alignment of envisioned and heard object, whose 'exteriority is congruent with its interiority,' and she suggests that the woman's gestures are confined by the voice and vice-versa into one homogenised meaning - so that she is overheard as well as overseen. Synchronisation further asserts the primacy of the diegetic, over the non-diegetic, experience so that the male 'containment' of the woman (safe from extraneous, hence subversive possibility) becomes absolute. Finally, the authority of the male from outside the diegesis is well illustrated from the position of the more common male voice-overs: from on high.⁴ Thus (in addressing the issue of Bemberg's displayed star) this chapter will consider whether and how Bemberg disembodies the female voice, as well as examine whether through the female gaze, Bemberg posits a way, in Sandy Flitterman Lewis' phrase, to desire differently. Although Bemberg's later practice involves women looking at (displayed versions of) each other, it begins with women looking at men: the form that female agency takes in the earlier Momentos and Camila is in the initiatives taken within heterosexual affairs. Analysis of the female gaze at men will thus serve as introduction to a discussion of Bemberg's more complex articulation of the female gaze and a more blatant display of women in Miss Mary and in Yo. la peor de todas.

attachment to both the mother and the father.

⁴ Bemberg has only one male voice-over - in De eso no se habla. The point of this voice, however, is that it constantly asserts its lack of knowledge. If the authority of the voice were given to Doña Leonor, it would seem to speak her in an unproblematic way. Furthermore, it would be inappropriate to give Charlotte the voice-over, when the film's theme is her entrapment into alien forms of speech and sight.

1. Textual Analysis of Bemberg as Female Author: All About Desire.

A. *Women Looking at Men: Momentos, Camila and the Female Heterosexual Gaze*

In 1982, Elba de Borras, a female Argentine critic, averred of Bemberg's representation of men in her first two films that they 'are always weak, and from such a basis follows erroneous generalisations, such as ... with them it's impossible to have fulfilling relationships' (Tiempo de Córdoba, 20 June 1982, 6-7). de Borras' objections raise pertinent issues. Firstly, how often are male directors criticized for their presentation of weak women? Secondly, whilst it is a frequent accusation - that in women's films, men are weak - in mainstream cinema, men's weakness, where it exists, is usually constructed as strength. Thirdly, what de Borras neglects to consider is that Bemberg's feminist camera is unusual in expressing a fondness for the young male heterosexual body. Although Bemberg is not the only woman director of the 1980s to film a naked man, Barbara Quart (1989, 5) places Bemberg's Camila at the forefront of woman's cinematic claim to the male body.⁵ Of Miss Mary she further says, 'There are women directors like María Luisa Bemberg, who place at the heart of the film an older woman's desire for a sweet young boy-man.' Here Bemberg runs counter to the look at men in mainstream films. Of men in these (Hollywood) films Steve Neale's (1993, 14) analysis suggests that either their bodies are stylized and fragmented by close ups, or are filmed in a movement which deflects any danger of their objectification by desire. Furthermore, the structuring of our look at these men 'is not direct, it is heavily mediated by the looks of the characters involved. Those looks are marked not by desire, but

⁵ Quart places Bemberg and Camila alongside Agnès Varda and Documenteur (France, 1981).

rather by fear, or hatred, or aggression' (Neale 1993, 18). Those few male bodies that are looked at - such as Rock Hudson's, as bearer of the (female) erotic look in Sirk's melodramas - are feminised (Ibid, 18), which feminisation implies a flaw in their representation as male. The following analysis of the male lover in Momentos and Camila will now consider how Bemberg's camera constructs a look at lovers as objects of desire, and at whether, how and why it inflects their 'weakness.'

Previous chapters have discussed the transgressions of Bemberg's female protagonists, beginning with the 'autobiographical' sexual transgressions of Lucía in Momentos and of Leonora in Señora de Nadie. Nevertheless, the female protagonist's transgressions are not restricted to the narrative of her sexual encounters, but are constituted also in the ways in which Bemberg makes her gaze at her lover. Twenty minutes into Momentos, Lucía and Nicolás consummate their affair. She visits him in what we take to be a city or business flat. He is organising everything 'just so.' His nervousness is indicated in the way in which he takes rapid, but shallow, inhalations from his cigarette. This tension is continued and made palpable in the hesitation of Lucía's own entrance and in the fact that not much is spoken between them. He expresses a kind of feminine pleasure, looking askance at the table he has set, as she looks across to it. There is no sense in which sound is dictating spectator emotion or involvement. There are only the ambient sounds of outside traffic, Nicolás' laying of the table and the rustling of Lucía's coat. He takes control of the conversation and draws the blinds. On Lucía's entry (in the far left corner of the

screen) into what we take to be the kitchen, there is a cut to her re-emerging into the living-room space with a tray of tea.

Lucía's look begins the next sequence. We infer from her puzzled look straight ahead that the room is empty, until we follow her gaze around to the point at which it finally rests: out of the right-hand side of the frame. After she has noticed where Nicolás is, non-diegetic music (in a minor key, evocative of melancholy) begins. This music is significant to the establishment of Lucía's subjectivity. She is reluctant to begin the affair and the music reminds us that this scene is framed (as are those scenes of her homecoming analysed in the first part of this thesis) by her sad reminiscence of it. Thus melancholy accompanies the camera's movements with her into the space (to the left of the screen) where Nicolás is sitting sideways on the bed, with his feet on the floor. Lucía motivates the camera's movements in the beginning of a long take of fluid figure movement and minimal dialogue. She is standing above him. After putting down the tray and kneeling down between his knees, she is higher in the left side of the frame than he is on the right. He explains that he thought it, 'Better to have our tea here.' Lucía now appropriates control of the situation in the gesture of her hand put to his ear (silencing him) as, in Fig.6.1, she replies, 'Later:'⁶

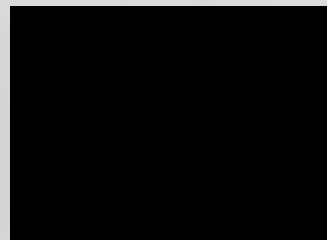


Fig.6.1.

⁶ In all of their subsequent actions, Lucía is the one who assumes agency and control. She initiates all the caresses and kisses. Nicolás jumps nervously.

The picture moves into a slow dissolve as they kiss, so that the spectator is denied voyeuristic pleasure in either of them. The camera holds its position on this two-shot profile, but zooms in slowly. Its treatment of the lovers' first kiss thus invites spectator sympathy rather than involvement.⁷ It is Nicolás' body that, following the move of his head,

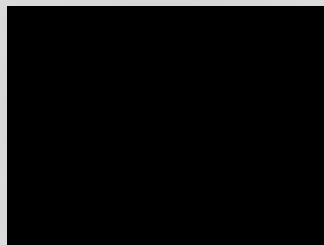


Fig.6.2.

will come round to the front of the screen, however, thereby occluding a view of her body.

Bemberg's first love scene is one in which the female protagonist assumes control. Such control is underlined by the framing in which she is dominant. It is a scene where there has been a primacy of visual images over verbal language. The spectator is never given definition of either of the lovers' thoughts. The sex itself, in its prelude only, is suggested rather than told, and the long take leading to the kiss underscores the tenderness of it. The narrative, from adulterous bed to home, also reinforces with sensitivity Lucía's complex feelings that the lighting and soundtrack have intimated. Her subjectivity is provided not least by the fact that the whole scene of adultery has been orchestrated as her memory of the occasion. Bemberg's female gaze anticipates its more complex structuring

⁷ Such sympathy takes account of the lovers' remarkable physical resemblance to each other, so that the composition of this adultery suggests symmetry, balance, appropriateness.

as a framing device (discussed below) in Miss Mary. Although Lucía's eyeline match is suggested when Lucía looks across to where Nicolás is, she is, however, given here (as neither is Miss Mary) no point-of-view shot. Therefore, whilst Lucía is accorded a female gaze on an equal footing with that of the man (at whom she is looking straight), the spectator is not sewn into her point of view. We have to wait for Camila for that. Similarly, the sound design strongly suggests, but ultimately withholds the protagonist's thoughts, so that her emotional subjectivity is rendered as central to the spectator as it remains 'unknown' and therefore 'uncontrolled.'

Nevertheless, in the second lovemaking scene (about an hour into the film) Nicolás' body is more prominent. It is as if Lucía's desiring gaze is becoming more confident. The scene opens with a still life - a close up of a breakfast tray, on which a silver mate pot dominates. The stillness of the image arrests us and the self-conscious aesthetic of the composition establishes a serious tone:

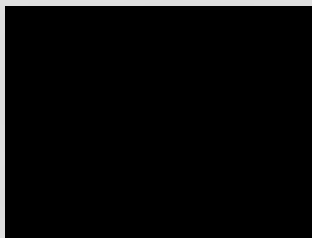
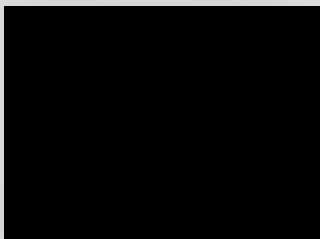
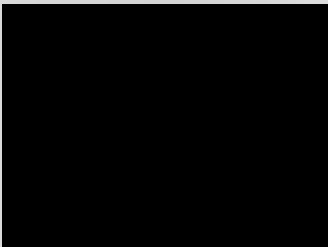


Fig.6.3.

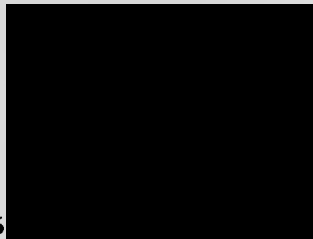
The camera slowly pulls back until it brings into frame the side view of Nicolás, naked and semi-recumbent in the left-hand foreground. Lucía (in the far corner of the bed) is relegated to the left quarter of the frame. Nicolás moves from a semi-prone position (by pulling up his leg that is nearest to the camera). Now his nakedness is magnified at the extreme front of the screen,

Fig.6.4

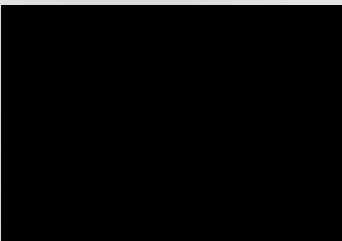
so that when (at Lucía's instigation),

Fig.6.5

he lifts up her foot into the screen's

Fig.6.6

centre to kiss it, **Fig.6.6** it is his body that the camera foregrounds and 'caresses':

Fig.6.7

Just as Lucía's gaze becomes more confident, so, as her filmmaking progresses, does that of Bemberg's camera. Two films later, in Camila, the female protagonist is immediately accorded a direct gaze, almost a brazen stare, at a man, in a scene in which looking as a form of predatory power is made thematically clear. Fourteen minutes into the film, Camila is the blind man in a

game of blind man's bluff at her birthday party. As Camila starts chasing her guests, the camera moves with her in a tracking shot. The initial long take over a wide space gives a sense of closing in when eventually Camila and the camera move towards Ladislao - the new priest. Now the protagonists are framed in a two-shot confrontation with their faces in profile to the screen. Of the remaining eleven shots, nine are shot/countershots of Camila and Ladislao, so that they are the only two individuals of whom we have a clear sense amongst a large crowd. Furthermore, their framing (in mid-close-up, over-the-shoulder shots) gets gradually tighter. This forces on us a kind of relentless, inescapable, sense of intimacy within what is nevertheless (always just beyond the frame) a public space.

Once Camila has hold of Ladislao she caresses his face sensually, so that the sense of touch inflects the quality of her 'looking':

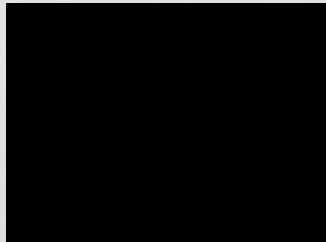


Fig.6.8.

The next cut to Camila's face registers her gasped knowledge (from the feel of his clothes) that she is touching a priest. Her words, 'It isn't Father Félix, nor Eduardo,' indicate that she has already guessed who it is. She continues to rub

^a The change in hue is not deliberate: these images are captured from a poor video recording. (It is, however, the best recording that I could locate in Buenos Aires.)

his shoulders, however (in a cut back to her point-of-view shot of his troubled pleasure). Ladislao's voice confirms his identity as the new priest when he answers her request to 'Say something to me, please.' In guessing her quarry's identity, Camila has won the game already. Her next act is therefore wilfully transgressive, of the game and of the social codes it represents. She takes off her blindfold and holds the priest with her stare:



Fig.6.9.

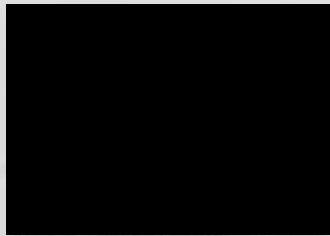
Camila's defiance here lies in the assertion of her will to desire. The momentousness of this look cannot be overstated. The scene of the blindfold is preluded by Camila's delivery home in a coach by her protector. He polices her reading matter to protect her from the State, he says. These words now resonate as a reminder of a 'protection' that Camila's gaze is outstaring.

The two longest shots of the sequence strongly suggest Camila's sexual agency. One (from Ladislao's point of view) shows that Camila is, undeterred, holding the stare. The other, in a cut to her sighted point of view, reveals the instability of Ladislao's looking:

**Fig. 6.10.**

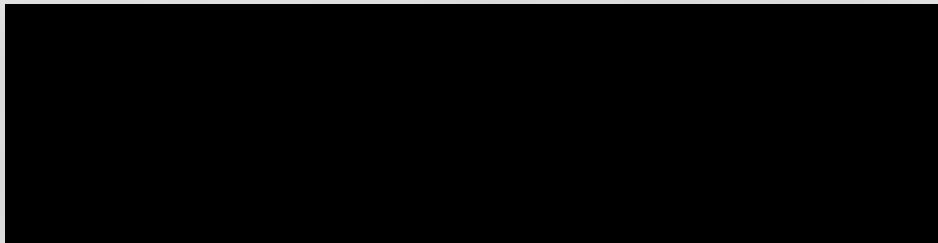
He is looking obliquely to the left. He looks back briefly and she walks away. The one here who cannot bear the weight of the woman's desiring look is the man.⁹ Thus Camila's look demands (but does not always get) a reciprocal gaze and another way of seeing. It is a gaze whose meaning here is that of desire (and later in the film becomes one of love). The sensual, even sexual, quality of this gaze finds its equivalence in the physical one of touch.

That such a look cannot be borne for long is intimated by the shocked faces of the trio of elderly, over-dressed women in the next shot:

**Fig.6.11.**

⁹ When Camila and Ladislao are first blindfolded in the scene of execution, they strain through their blindfolds to see each other, but Ladislao is again the first one to look down. Ladislao's comparative abjectness here is picked up later on: when they are in their seats of execution, they still strain to locate each other through their blindfolds. Now the visual weighting is handed over to Camila, however. There are three extreme close ups of Camila (to two of Ladislao), and each of her is of five seconds' duration compared to two seconds' duration for each close up of Ladislao. Camila's defiance continues to the end.

These women answer the scene's call for a humour that will defuse the shock of its transgressions.¹⁰ The suspended movement of their fans signals, comically, their outrage whilst the cut from the soft pink hues on Camila's face to the tripled crimson of their attire jolts any innocent spectator out of her comfortable approval of Camila's game. Nevertheless, any response of relieved laughter is to be short-lived, threatened as it is by the women's occlusion by an officer (whose red-liveried bands of the dictator Rosas on his cuffs are highlighted in a close up) passing across the extreme frontal plane of the screen. The menace of his presence connects these women's scandalised reaction to the dangers of Camila's transgression. Punishment is inevitable. Unprotected from her wilful defiance of the state, her consequent assumption of the blindfold for her death (where Camila will nonetheless continue looking for Ladislao, and asserting her right to her object of desire) is presaged. Camila's 'game' (Fig.6.12) and her execution (Figs.6.13 & 6.14) are iconographically connected:

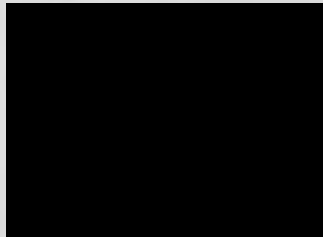
**Fig.6.12****Fig.6.13****Fig.6.14.**

Nevertheless, at the same time that she claims with her look her right to desire, the protagonist's image, as an object that is spoken, eludes us. We hardly hear Camila at-all. The officer's footsteps provide the loudest ambient noise of the sequence, which otherwise consist of birdsong and of party laughter (both of which quieten on the shot/countershots). Although the birdsong gets louder in

¹⁰ Hyper-dressed 'ladies' are a frequent comic motif in Bemberg's films.

shot two where the tight framing of the pair begins, the effect is (as it is in Momentos) to underline the weight of the woman's claim.

This claim is realised once these lovers have eloped. Now the camera also can express Camila's heterosexual desire, and does so in the first love scene in their cottage. We first see Camila, naked (from her shoulders upwards), in profile and



mid-close-up: **Fig.6.15**

The next cut to Ladislao

establishes his relative passivity:

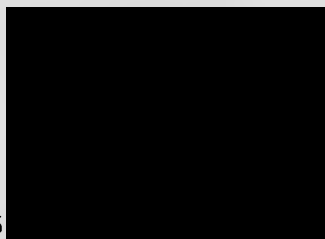


Fig.6.16

He is lying down on the bed, whilst she

has been sitting upright. From him the camera pulls back and to the right to accommodate them both. Whilst Camila is further forward in, and now dominates, the frame, the light picks out Ladislao's nakedness, not hers, for she is sitting against (and is therefore bleached out by) the only diegetic source of light from the window behind her. In the subsequent cross-cut, close-up shots (now tightly framed) there is a delicate balance of composition, with Ladislao on the left, and Camila on the right, of their respective screen spaces. Thus, in the one two shot of the scene, in which she moves into his frame, her left side had always been empty, and waiting (like Ladislao) for her:

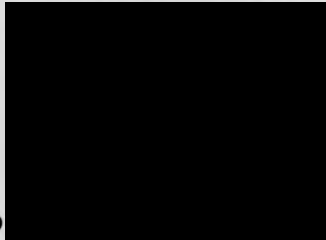
Fig.6.17

The space of this screen becomes available to her movements. She initiates a kiss and moves over his face,

Fig.6.18

into centre-frame. The next cut is on his

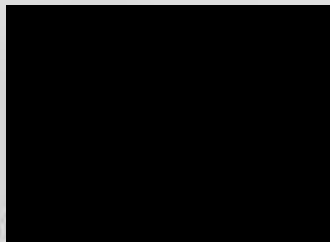
movement, rolling over her, **Fig.6.19**



so that his

body at the extreme front of the screen blocks most of hers. Meanwhile, the camera has pulled back to accommodate them more widely in a mid-distance

shot: **Fig.6.20**



This both allows a discreet view of their lovemaking and displays at full-length Ladislao's nakedness. The camera remains on the image of his body bathed in a dark golden light for three seconds before the cut to Ladislao at a blackboard in the much brighter light of daytime.¹¹

¹¹ Again, as in the case of *Momentos*, the change in hue (from Fig.6.17 to Fig.6.18 onwards) is

Both Lucía and Camila look at and desire a young male body. This is also true of Miss Mary. My earlier analyses of the love scene between Miss Mary and Johnny, however, concentrated on Miss Mary's repressions of memory and suggested her eventual failure at the point at which the lighting brightened. Of interest to this chapter's discussions is that in that scene the glow on Johnny's body (made more scintillating by the drops of water on his hair and face) is brighter than that on Miss Mary's face, suggesting a revelatory quality of desire with which the female protagonist's gaze is fraught. In Miss Mary's appraisal of Johnny there is a glow of bright white light running down his neck. A pale golden reflection of this is thrown onto his bare chest and arms as they are centred in the frame. This glistening effect of illumination is highlighted by contrast with all of Johnny's point-of-view shots of Miss Mary, fully-dressed and in a cooler light. Such contrasting also suggests that Johnny's appraisal of Miss Mary is not significant. The important truth of this scene (as in those scenes of *Momentos* and *Camila* analysed above) is the woman's sexual desire.

Analysis of Bemberg's male lovers suggests that she both counters mainstream representations of the male body, and that in having her protagonist look at them, counters the traditional economy of the female gaze. When a film shows active women and passive men, the traditional position of the spectator is challenged. Thus Mary Ann Doane's (1987) 'hopeless' formulation - that the (heterosexual) woman in the audience is denied a true desiring position - can only be true (at-all) to the type of (mainstream) film she is analysing. The male

owing to a poor quality video recording.

lovers in Momentos, Camila and (eventually) in Miss Mary, are desired by the woman. The woman's actions motivate those of a camera, which looks at and caresses the male, whose body has been further privileged by lighting. Moreover, in both Momentos and Camila, the woman is the instigator of the sexual act, to which her male lover is passive recipient. Thus, against Suzanne Moore's suggestion (1988, 47) that the Levi's advertising campaign of 1986 provided the first instance, in a mainstream context, of a male body specifically coded (unlike the uneasy history of male pin-ups) for its 'to-be-looked-at-ness,' Bemberg warns us that (her 1981) practice preceeds a theory that bases its assumptions in western practice. And in answer to those criticisms of Bemberg's 'feminine' portrayal of men, it is subject for praise that in Lucía and Camila's looks, respectively, at Nicolás and Ladislao, Bemberg 'fails' to eroticise a male male. In Bemberg's hands men's 'feminisation' makes two feminist points: The first point is to celebrate a 'feminised' male. The second point suggests that men's passivity as lovers (and, in Ladislao's case, as a priest) intimate the more ominous weaknesses of men exemplified in the previous chapter.

It is also true that whilst Bemberg's early female protagonists are accorded the power of the gaze, and at the same time refuse containment, they themselves are not eroticised. The orchestration of the kiss in Momentos, and the pale lighting of the final close ups on Lucía, work against any sense of her display to the camera and spectator. This lack of display is marked in a scene in which Camila is actually hinting at her desires. In the 'feminine' scene early on in Camila in which our protagonist (visited by several women during siesta and told of her

friend's engagement) lectures them all on the importance of love, the pink hue of the film is pronounced by the fact that the light in both framing sequences (which are given over to the Church and hence oppressive in substance) is more subdued. The girlish femininity of the scene is suggested in a uniformity of their white lace dresses, which blend with the pastel pinks and whites of the *mise-en-scène*. Whilst the camera is always motivated by Camila's movements (she moves right across the screen from one corner of the bedroom towards her bed), it takes in pink and white walls, pink drapes and the pink bed spread, until finally her own dress is seen as white against a white wall when she sits down. (Both whites, of course, are given a pink hue by the lighting.) Now Pecoraro so blends in (and is identified) with a pink *mise-en-scène* that the camera (whose movement is signaled by the inception of soft romantic notes of a piano) has to zoom in and frame her tightly at the scene's end to pick her out.

Nevertheless, Camila has anticipated and challenged a new kind of analysis of the female gaze. It is not quite yet the protagonist's sensuousness that is on display as that she displays her right to sensuality. Camila's challenge is not so much in her appropriation of the gaze as in the statement of desire with which it is informed. As the gaze has become more emotionally charged, so the *mise-en-scène* of this film is correspondingly richer, bathed in a pink hue, and picked out with red, colour of desire (as well as of blood, signifying her punishment).

Perhaps it is because it is not easy to define the nature of love, desire and eroticism, and how they cross each other, that much feminist analysis of the cinematic gaze has confined itself - with notable exceptions, such as that of Jackie Stacey (1988 and 1994) - to its articulation. As Camila's gaze is

straightforward, however, so neither is there the complication of what in Miss Mary and Yo, la peor de todas is the 'display' of actresses. Bemberg's later films request analysis of the quality and emotion of the gaze, as well as a closer analysis of what exactly we are looking at. In these films, women are looking at women.

B. Women Looking at Women: Miss Mary, Yo, la peor de todas and The Sexually Problematic Female Gaze

Against a correspondingly more lavish mise-en-scène, there is more 'display' of women (if not always of the female protagonists) in Bemberg's later films. If this display is now directed towards other women within the diegesis, the question must nonetheless be asked how Bemberg prevents their objectification. Analysis will suggest that she does this by a more complex articulation of the female gaze and voice, both of which are dislocated. Working with this is a dislocation in the fit of actress to role, so that the spectator is further disorientated from what s/he is seeing. Initial analysis of Miss Mary will pose more specific questions - of display, of dislocated gaze and of 'fit' - of Bemberg's feminist filmmaking in both Miss Mary and in Yo, la peor de todas. Finally, Stacey's (1988 and 1994) ideas concerning identity and desire in the female spectator will throw light on the emotional quality of one woman's looking at another.

In Miss Mary, sexually repressed women crystallize in the roles of Miss Mary, played by Julie Christie and of the Señora, Mecha, played by Nacha Guevara, with her 'painted face, so arrogant and so lonely.' Bemberg chose Christie for

her Britishness, which, in this film, connotes racist imperialism. Thus Christie is playing against her persona as a political activist.¹² The other aspect of Christie's star persona is that of an intense sexuality against which is read her role of sexually-repressed governess. Similarly, as Mecha, Nacha Guevara is playing against her Argentine and US star persona.¹³ Guevara is a chanteuse (famous in radical café concerts) and a political activist, with a legendary evil temper.¹⁴ Against these repressed women appears Luisina Brando, who as Argentine actress connotes a beauty infused with melancholy and wit. She makes a guest appearance in *Miss Mary*, which is cameo by virtue of its brevity and type-cast by virtue of her representation as a loose woman.¹⁵ This is Perla, a lower-class woman, who has been living 'above her station' with Pacheco. The socially-respectable company suspects Perla of having slept with him for his money.

Perla first appears (conflicting with Miss Mary and Mecha) halfway into the film. These three actresses oppose (looking at each other) over a wedding table. This wedding is the result of the aristocratic/charitable impulses of Mecha, whose proper sense of respectability has (earlier in the film) been scandalised by the peasant bride and bridegroom's long conjugal association. Perla is

¹² Julie Christie (in King, Whitaker and Bosch 2000, 49) has said, 'I asked (Bemberg) why she chose me and she rather horrified me by saying, "Because I think you're so English dear."' Nevertheless, Bemberg uses Christie's Britishness to great effect. In one scene, Teresa asks Miss Mary, 'What's a socialist?' Christie replies, 'In England we call them robbers.'

¹³ Bemberg (in *Revista La Semana*, Buenos Aires, 1986) says she chose Nacha Guevara because she was interested in 'mixing her style, her songs, with this traditional person, conventional and neurotic ... all that was perfect.'

¹⁴ Lita Stantic said that on the shoot of *Miss Mary* all the Argentine 'temperamental stars' had to behave because the 'big' star Julie Christie was so professional and even-tempered. (I am - again - grateful for this anecdote to John King.)

¹⁵ The credits welcome 'the guest appearance of Luisina Brando.' Nevertheless, the term 'star' must be used advisedly with relation to Brando. Although recognisable to an Argentine audience as a Bemberg favourite, and certainly as sexually vivacious, Brando is not a 'star' in

recounting a joke at the expense of the recently-deceased Pacheco. Her monologue begins with an establishing shot outlining her audience's seating positions. Miss Mary with the children is at one end of the table, whilst Perla is at the other, facing Alfredo, Señor Bordagain. To her left is the admiring Ernesto (Mecha's brother), and further to the left, at the top end of the table looking down it, is Mecha herself. The sequence of eighteen mid-close-up shots then plays on the relationships and various positions between the principal members of Perla's audience. Furthermore, the sequence itself is framed by Miss Mary's response to Teresa's, 'Miss Mary, where's Monte Carlo? ... That's where Grandpapa became poor.' Miss Mary looks across the table, to Grandpapa's empty seat, but therefore not in an eyeline match to the cut to Perla who now begins her story. This is significant in many ways. Firstly it identifies Perla with Grandpapa for she is (in the prejudices of Mecha) bartering her sex for Pacheco's money. She too represents the financial undoing of such as Grandpapa and is a threat to the wealth upon which the upper classes are predicated. Secondly, although mid close ups on Miss Mary frame Perla's story, and although the whole larger scene is structured as her reminiscence, this sequence is not now told from her point of view. Nevertheless, that it is Miss Mary's reminiscence is important to an analysis of the shots between the women.¹⁶

the sense that her persona is read and widely known beyond her films, as is that of Guevara or of Christie.

¹⁶ Immediately prior to this scene Miss Mary has been seen in close-up in the cold blues of the vault of a cathedral, deep in sorrowful thought. She is there for Teresa's shotgun wedding. The whole of this next scene is therefore played out as Miss Mary's reminiscence in a time of deep sadness.

This is Brando's scene. Of the eighteen shots, seven are given over to her. There are never cuts to more than two of the others at a time without a return to her. The rhythm of the cutting is such that Brando is given three long takes while all shorter shots simply establish the orchestration of her audience. Her tale is as an, 'I said, he said' anecdote. This (through its invitation to mimicry) allows for acting up to her audience (which is mostly composed of men), and for display. It begins with, 'He was so mean,' and is punctuated throughout with her physical gestures. These are expressive and full of life. She is all hands and eyes. The light catches her dark eyes in their frequent movements around the table, while her hands punctuate and underline the emotional affect of her tale as well as give a sense of exaggeration in the telling. Her red nails are prominent (Fig.6.22), even more so when she lifts her drink. At the end on her, 'He sat down and he said ... ,' she folds her arms in a mannish way.

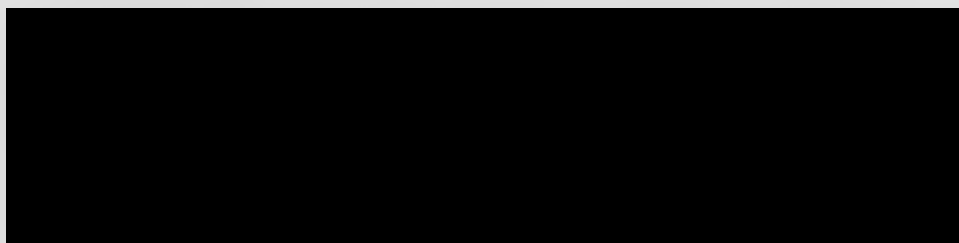
Perla has been looking for recognition, looking across the table and directly out of the front of the screen, to the left and to the right. She mostly looks directly to her left, to Ernesto, and over to Alfredo. Nevertheless, although Perla looks for the most part at the men, this is after a first failed attempt to gain, with a rare eyeline match to Mecha, the latter's approval, who is studiously oblivious. That Mecha has rebuffed her in one of the few point-of-view shots that Perla is given, makes this a loaded moment. Perla reacts by playing up her role of careless abandon: part of her own motivation for 'display' is involved in some way with a wish for female recognition. But always in contrast to her sensual presence, Miss Mary is politely using her knife and fork and Mecha is coldly sucking on her thumb or posting some fruit into her mouth whilst slightly swaying (in

controlled irritation her performance suggests) from side to side. However strong Brando's physical presence is, there is the sense in which if one woman is ignoring, the other is alienated from, it.

Furthermore, whilst sound is significant to the suggestion of Perla's disturbing physicality, it reinforces a sense of estrangement between all participants in the scene. Perla's voice is a constant presence (sometimes extra-diegetically) so that the visual cuts to others reinforce their satellite positions to her. Competing with this is the ambient sound of Miss Mary's knife and fork on the plate, which continues extra-diegetically as a polite counterpoint to Brando's sensual storytelling. Furthermore, birdsong is constantly in the background but is only obtrusive again on the final cut back to Miss Mary. This underlines both Miss Mary's silence and Brando's gusty voice that is silenced against it. In fact, Perla's gestures are the only ones we hear, indicating her lack of physical restraint and inhibition. The laughter of the men is full throated and the only woman to compete with this is Perla, with her clicking fingers (to reinforce the action of her tale, 'and he went'), and with at one point her hand put down heavily on the table. On the contrary, when Mecha finally relents we see but do not hear her laugh (Fig.6.21). Thus all of the women (even Brando) have been speaking in voices that are 'disembodied' from their images on screen. Most images of each of them are counterpointed with the sounds of others. Such use of verbal and ambient sound answers the feminist call for a de-synchronisation of the female voice and her body at the same time that it increases the sense of alienation within this scene.

Arguably, the most alienating aspect of this sequence is its lack of a clear point-of-view structuring. Nobody is accorded the power of the gaze. Alfredo is given two point-of-view shots (he is after all the powerful patriarch now that Grandpapa is declining), but Ernesto is accorded none. The cuts back from him to Perla are not eyeline matches. Perla is twice given point-of-view shots of Alfredo, and once of Ernesto, but the other cuts to them are not motivated by her looking. When there are cuts to her various listeners they are usually not to the one to whom she has last appealed with her eyes. Thus whilst Perla is acting and enjoying it, the spectator is not sewn into her subjectivity. She is afforded as little subjectivity as she is social recognition or other women's 'approval'.

The most striking alienation, however, is that of Miss Mary herself, who, unlike Mecha, does not laugh at-all. The end of the sequence is signaled with the cut to a different configuration in the frame (Fig.6.23) as well as to a much more washed out lighting:

**Fig. 6.21****Fig.6.22****Fig.6.23.**

Thus Miss Mary is notably absent from the friction which appears to be between Mecha and the latter. These relative relationships to each other have been underlined by costume and by colour. Perla (as in Fig.6.22) is dressed in black and white and shows stark against the sunlight as opposed to Miss Mary who, in plain pale blue dress, is bleached out (as if insignificant) against it. Mecha (as in

Fig.6.21) is against a darker foliage that highlights the ice-blue coldness of her dress. As opposed to the pearly sensuousness of Perla's jewellery, Mecha has ornate, but brittle, gold earrings. Miss Mary (pertinently, in the light of Brando's unabashed openness) answers Johnny's, 'How old are you Miss Mary?' with a prudish (British) and trite, 'Ask no questions, you get no lies.' Why has Miss Mary remembered this when she was not part of it at the time? Is she mourning her 'widowed' love for Johnny as well as Teresa's projected waste in marriage? Perhaps her most significant memory is of the real sorrow and expressed desire implicit in Perla's sigh before she concluded her tale with, 'I loved him.'

Bernberg delights in and plays with the femininity of Brando in two ways in this sequence. The performance of the anecdote as a sexual conquest expresses a joy that co-exists with and qualifies Perla's lack of power. There is a sense in which the display of her sexuality, brash on her part, and delighting on Bernberg's, atones such impotence. Secondly, there is the spectator's straight sensual pleasure in looking at Brando and the opulent compositions in which she appears, which is further counterpointed by the strong because repressed star presence of the other two women, one of whose repressedness almost renders her absent. How, then, is this feminist? The minimal point of view afforded Perla (and others) answers potential problems attendant on her display in four ways. Firstly, it is a formal inscription and reminder of her lack of power in this patriarchal world where grandfathers can choose to play around and to lose their wealth in Monte Carlo. Secondly, the fact that no person is privileged by the point of view disorientates the spectator from possession of that (woman) which

is displayed. Thirdly, the ambiguities inherent in a lack of a clear point-of-view structuring, suggest that there is some complicated play here - that the protagonists, and maybe even the text, cannot quite acknowledge - about desire between women. This is expressed in some confusion between wanting to look (but not daring/Miss Mary) and wanting to be looked at by women (but not being/Perla). Here Bemberg foregrounds Mulvey's (1975) problematising of the sexually-pleasurable conditioning of women's 'to-be-looked-at-ness.' Fourthly, in the character of Perla, Bemberg also suggests an alternative position or quality of the 'desire to desire' in the 'desire to be desired' by another woman.

Judith Mayne (1990, 27) uses the term 'homotextuality' to discuss those disturbances in the structure of spectacle and the look that return with the force of the repressed. The desire expressed by Miss Mary is, however, even more complex than that expressed by Perla. It is more than either homo-, or hetero-, sexual. Although Miss Mary's look at Perla is tinged with eroticism, the object of its desires is the expression of a heterosexual love. Perla's image evokes in Miss Mary a sense of nostalgia for a heterosexual desire that Perla can, but that she never dared, express. Therefore, Miss Mary's desiring position is not equivalent to that of a heterosexual man for a woman, but is one that envies a heterosexual woman's expression of her desire. Here, in 1986, Bemberg has pre-emptively moved beyond Mary Ann Doane's (1987) formulation of woman's mere envy of desire, in that the true expression of that desire which is envied is fully realised by another screen woman. Thus Bemberg's film practice accords with the lesbian critiques of Doane and Mulvey's placing of the female

spectator in a shifting position between a narcissistic identification with the woman protagonist and a transvestite one with the hero. Miss Mary suggests that such a shifting position is only made true by delimiting woman as heterosexual. Furthermore, its construction of the female gaze suggests that Bemberg's apparently heterosexual films challenge easy definitions of women's sexuality/ies.

This instance of Miss Mary's 'desire for the desire' of other screen women also means that we can distinguish the erotic connections between women from what we can call overt lesbianism. In this sense Miss Mary critiques (and thereby anticipates Sue Thornham's criticism of) lesbian film criticism for ignoring the erotic charge that is available to all female spectators, whatever their sexuality (1997, 128). Although in her later The Practice of Love (1994) de Lauretis advocates multiple and shifting positions of desires and hence identification - progressing from a consideration of the articulation of a generalised lesbian desire (1985, 1987 and 1990), to differences of women to 'Woman' differences among women - she is nonetheless specifying a lesbian desire.¹⁷ Miss Mary suggests the same prescription in Judith Mayne's (1990) analyses. In looking only at films which explore possibilities of new forms of visual pleasure that begin in erotic, as in lesbian, connections between women, Mayne and de Lauretis sidestep the possibility of desires between women that may be other or more than erotic. Nevertheless, a kind of erotic charge does inflect (in other films as well as Miss Mary) the relationships that Bemberg depicts between many of her women, so how should we define it?

If - in 1988 when Jackie Stacey was writing on female spectatorship - the theory of women's desire was not, as she suggests, worked out, it is clear that Bemberg was experimenting with it in Miss Mary. According to Stacey, All About Eve and Desperately Seeking Susan - in insisting upon women's differences from each other - prevent the spectator's complete transformation to that woman on the screen that is looked at. Bemberg similarly denies, but presents the wish for, the fulfilment of transformation. Nevertheless, although Stacey's approach broadens the analysis of desire from the purely erotic to wider questions of fascination between women, Miss Mary would seem to suggest that even these wider questions are erotic. In this sense Bemberg anticipates Stacey's own revisions concerning the spectator and desire. In 1988, for Stacey, 'fascination' is not the same thing as lesbian/erotic desire. In her ethnographic study Stargazing (1994) Stacey returned to the relationship of identification to desire, however. She asserts that she is not suggesting the de-eroticisation of desire but the eroticisation of some forms of identification.¹⁸ This more nearly approaches what seems to be occurring in Miss Mary, where the nature of the look itself is anything but sexual, but the substance of its wish is for that which is erotic. Stacey's analysis of spectator identification and desire offers the more contradictory model of spectatorship, and of a relay of looks between women within the diegesis and across the screen, that Miss Mary seem to be constructing.

¹⁷ de Lauretis' suggestion now is that a multiple and eroticised engagement with difference would bring also a recognition of differences within women; differences arising from their fractured and multiple positionings across race, class, gender etc.

¹⁸ Stacey's assertion here is in answer to de Lauretis' (1991) criticisms of her (1988) article Desperately Seeking Difference. de Lauretis criticises Stacey for de-eroticising desire by confusing lesbian desire with narcissistic identification.

C. Bemberg's Display of Her 'Stars': Miss Mary, Yo, la peor de todas, The Instability of Tthe Female Gaze and Problematic 'Fit.'

This thesis now will posit that Bemberg's display of, yet spectator alienation from, her female 'stars' is what, uniquely, she has to offer to feminist filmmaking. Such display is both cause of desire between women, and effect of their desire to be desired by each other. Nevertheless, this desire is expressed from a position of (indeed as) alienation. As the case of Julie Christie as Miss Mary has shown her to be playing against her star persona, this chapter now explores how such display-yet-alienation may be effected not only through a dislocated gaze, but through a creative use of problematic 'fit.'

i. Julie Christie as Miss Mary, and Assumpta Serna as Sor Juana.

Richard Dyer (1979, 89-131) discusses the 'perfect' and 'problematic' fit between a star's image and the character that the star is playing. As one instance and kind of 'problematic' fit, he cites the case of Marilyn Monroe in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (Howard Hawks, USA, 1953) where 'there is ... a quite massive disjunction between Monroe as image and Lorelei as character, so that the character of Monroe as Lorelei becomes contradictory to the point of incoherence.' Even where a 'problematic' fit is resolved, it is often at the expense, or in despite, of either the star image or of character, so that the lack of fit can be a symptom of 'miscasting' nevertheless. I posit that two glaring instances of problematic fit in Bemberg's films are of Julie Christie as uptight governess in Miss Mary and of Assumpta Almodóvarian Serna as erudite nun in

Yo, la peor de todas. The case of Christie will be briefly discussed before elaborating how Dyer's theory may illuminate Bemberg's casting of Serna.

ii. Julie Christie as Miss Mary: Repression and Desire

To Miss Mary Julie Christie brings 'always already' the 'weight' of her 1960s' image of a kind of 'free love' sexuality.¹⁹ This star image conflicts with her character of a repressed and oppressive governess, so that Christie's 'fit' here is of the problematic type. This is made clear by the film's opening scene. Unlike Brando in the wedding sequence, Christie merges into her background. The first credit of Miss Mary has privileged Christie's name and we are made to expect a star entrance. Our first view of her, however, occurs on a cut to absolute silence from the jolly sounds of 'Ain't She Sweet,' and from the black and white photography of the credits to a scene in colour so muted it initially appears monochrome. We see a woman - in long-shot, sitting perched on her bed in an ungraceful posture, feet flat on the floor, dressed in a green-check dressing gown (which is tied tightly around the waist), and whose hair is scraped back off her face. The plainness of the room is clear. The camera moves in (forming a slight arc to the left) to take in on Christie's left, a chair draped in a plain brown blanket, before (panning to the right) taking in the wall behind her, whose vast off-white expanse is relieved by two small, framed photographs only (whose images are indistinct).

From now on the camera moves slowly with Christie as she gets up and moves around the room. As she gets up her shadow thrown against the wall intimates

¹⁹ This 'sense' of Christie's image is not researched.

(in the context of this scene) her bleak insubstantiality. When she moves to her trunk she does so behind a glass pane whilst the camera remains on the other side of the glass, so that she and her environment are completely washed out. Thus the *mise-en-scène* of her femininity is subdued indeed. As she moves back to her bed and into the greater (but still muted) light of the scene, this woman's plainness and age are reinforced as she puts on her glasses to read. The scene's first sound is not of her diegetic voice, but of her voice-over, suggesting that the femininity pictured here is all about an interiority that is the opposite of flamboyant display.²⁰ When she moves back to the trunk, the camera moves with her but this time behind the glass and frames her in close-up. Nevertheless, this first close up of the film's female star shares its distinction with the delicate filigree lace work (minutely picked out by the camera's focusing) of the curtains framing her. Thus Christie is rendered more subdued than her background, and thus the film's opening underlines a problematic fit of star to character - of vivacious persona to repressed woman.

'Problematic' is not here synonymous with 'problem', however. Christie as Miss Mary will not be incoherent because the film reveals the character itself to be formed of the contradictory but inter-dependent impulses towards respectability and a free expression of her sexuality.²¹ In Christie, image and character are more than 'just touching at certain points,' but held in a permanent creative tension to each other, so that the mis-fit between Miss Mary's assumed respectability and the weight of the sexuality that it represses glares

²⁰ In this voice-over Miss Mary says, 'Perhaps you should have gone to India, Miss Mary. At least it's clear there who the natives are.'

²¹ Furthermore, because Christie should be so vivacious there seems also to be some connection between Miss Mary's frigidity and the dying empire that she represents.

deliberately.²² Christie's star persona brings a sexuality that renders more intense the sense of its repression at the same time that the Britishness that Bemberg recognized in her already connotes a 'stiff upper lip.'

Thus 'the particular point of signification' where the contradiction between image and character may be discerned is in Miss Mary's sexuality, and is constructed and constructive. Such contradiction is vivid in the scene analysed above where three 'stars' confront each other at the peasants' wedding. Its constructedness is well illustrated by the diametrical opposition of the characters of the vivacious Perla and of the frigid Miss Mary and by the differential 'fits' of the actresses who play them. Luisina Brando's fit of sexually-vivacious actress to loose woman is 'perfect,' while Christie's fit of 1960s' glamour-girl to inhibited 'spinster,' is 'problematic.' (The problematic nature of Christie's fit is nuanced by the fact that her indelible sexy 'swinging London' image has - by the time she plays Miss Mary - accumulated the layers of the star's own 'maturity.' These aspects of Christie's star persona - her maturity and her sexiness - are already in tension to one another.) Weighing star against star is appropriate. Dyer suggests that the 'fit' or not has to be weighed, amongst other things, with other performances and casting, and with the structure of the film. Finally therefore, from Dyer's other conjecture that one would expect perfect fit where the part is written for the star, we can argue that an opposing one can sometimes apply: Bemberg has chosen a star whose image conflicts with the part. To the above inflection of these arguments, however (namely her deliberate use of problematic fit in the case of Christie) can be linked another of Bemberg's

²² I adapt Dyer (1979, 130) who talks of star image and the character played as 'touching.'

specificities as a feminist filmmaker: that of a display of, and delight in, glamorous femininity. In other words, how do Bemberg's films use (perfect and) problematic fit to highlight or further display the 'femininities' of her female protagonists?

The link between a sometimes lack of fit and the delight in a display of femininity in Bemberg's films (such as in her showcasing of Luisina Brando) is to be found in a particularity of her point-of-view structuring. The scene at the peasants' wedding is Miss Mary's reminiscence, but any subjectivity within the scene that she remembers, is denied her. Firstly, there is a sense, as we have seen, in which she is physically absent from it. The analysis above has seen Brando disturbing the scene with her physicality, and has suggested that Christie is both defined and obliterated by her. The physical/sexual definition of Brando's presence points up what in Christie is repressed - the sexuality of her star image. Secondly, Miss Mary's physical absence is linked here to a strange absence of point of view. Miss Mary is excluded, made absent, not only from her remembering, but from what she really is. In other words, her absence signifies both her exclusion from what she desires and the repression of its presence within her (much as she struggles to repress memories of her night with Johnny). It signifies her desire for the desire that Brando's perfect fit connotes and displays, and which her own problematic fit denies. Here the rich ambiguities of problematic fit and of no point of view coalesce: The spectator delights in, but is estranged from, Brando's feminine display because it is Miss Mary's witness - that of an absent subjectivity - that mediates it to her delectation. The confidence of Lucía's remembered gaze in *Momentos* makes

an important point of contrast here, and suggests that instability only comes when the look is across and between women.

Perhaps Bemberg's specificity as a feminist filmmaker, one who celebrates feminine display (but who does not allow an exploitative spectator voyeurism), is located, amongst other things, in this linkage between problematic fit and strange or estranging points of view. Perhaps both questions of display and of estranged look and fit can find their answers in the films' constructions of desiring positions between women. These questions will now be applied to an analysis of the use of Assumpta Serna in Yo, la peor de todas.

iii. Assumpta Serna as Sor Juana: Displacement and Display

In her 'biopic' adaptation of Octavio Paz' biography of Sor Juana, Bemberg highlights and even exaggerates his claims that the nun's downfall was caused because she threatened the Church as an intellectual woman and (despite Bemberg's intentions) not least as one woman who was in love with another one. Her choice of actors here would appear to be governed (if unwittingly) by a notion of 'perfect' fit. Assumpta Serna had starred in earlier lesbian roles and Dominique Sanda (as the vicereine) had also starred in roles that can at least be described as sexually ambiguous.²³ Assumpta Serna as Sor Juana provides, however, an instance also of 'problematic' fit. Bemberg's choice of actor is made problematic by her discussion (in Trelles Plazaola 1991, 123) of its perfection: 'Assumpta Serna, the Catalan actress of Matador seemed perfect to

²³ To cite just two respective examples, Serna plays the role of a lesbian in El Jardín Secreto/The Secret Garden (Carlos Suárez, Spain, 1984) and Sanda plays Hélele, who can be interpreted as lesbian, in Le Voyage en douce/Sentimental Journey (Michel Deville, France, 1979).

me.' Although Bemberg chose Serna for her star appeal and elfin beauty - because she 'has mental energy and moreover, she is beautiful and beauty is moving' (in Revista ¿Qué Hacemos?, Buenos Aires, June 1990) - the perfection also appears to lie in the problematic fit of Serna's elfin beauty to her role in Matador. The heroine in Matador is no sensitive, witty nun, but physically strong and man-killing. How does such 'problematic' fit link with Bemberg's display of Sor Juana?

These issues of display and of fit are foregrounded in the scene in which the vicereine (recently-arrived from Madrid) is introduced to Juana. This occurs early (in the fifth scene and within the fourth minute) in the film. Their meeting (at a performance of one of Juana's lighthearted plays) allows their introduction to be 'staged' as one of actor (Juana) to audience (vicereine). The ideas of theatre and of its attendant display are therefore explicit. The sequence begins with Juana in a mid-distance shot as she listens as prompt to the performance of her drama. After the final lines of the play have been delivered and during the applause, the camera's dolly to the left witnesses the diegetic audience in profile forming a fan around the theatrical space into which (leading up to her meeting with the vicereine) Juana will walk. The vicereine comes to occupy the same position in the left side of the frame as Juana had on the right side before the camera had moved left from her. This mirror positioning picks out the two protagonists within the crowd, suggesting their future identification.

The double framing of Juana, as she comes forward and to rest in the first shot of her, is pointed. In the foreground she is framed by the two viceroys and in the

background by two arches of theatre, in which she stands in the middle as a column. She is framed and displayed as theatre, once for the vicereine and once more for us. Appropriately, once we move into the close ups, it is Juana and not the vicereine, who is given the star treatment, evidenced not least in the lights shining in her black eyes. The extreme close ups of Juana make more intense these eyes as well as signal the greater emotional weight attached to her image (witnessed through the point of view of the vicereine). Finally, Juana's wimple (Fig.6.25) frames a halo around her head and at the top and bottom edges of the screen, whereas the vicereine's more sensual opulence in a slightly less extreme close up (Fig.6.26) is apparent in pearl earrings and necklace.

Thus the fit of saintliness to sensual Assumpta Serna is 'problematic.' As with the case of Christie as Miss Mary, however, this is a fit that (far from being incoherent) holds in tension connotations of asceticism and of physicality. These connotations are witnessed by the vicereine in the longest shot of the sequence - one that, as from her point of view, also allows an extreme (most intimate) close up. It is clear that the one falling here is the vicereine. The orchestration of the shots establishes this. The first two shots establish Juana's position with relation to her diegetic audience. The second one confirms their configuration from her point of view: viceroy to the right, the Bishop of Puebla behind and the vicereine to the left, poised upright and in orange splendour. The next four cuts are close ups between the vicereine and Juana, with more extreme close ups on Juana. In this scene therefore the looks of the vicereine frame Juana. The following four shots, however, somewhat deflect the intimacy in that they go from the viceroy, to Juana, to the viceroy and end on the vicereine,

whose silent joy at her husband's suggestion that they adopt (in other words, protect) Juana is evident. The eleventh shot is a framing one of the Archbishop. Thus of eight close ups, two are accorded the viceroy, and three each to Juana and the vicereine. Furthermore, the rhythm of this sequence is such that in its middle the cutting slows down to give these six shots of the two women the greatest weight. In the longer close up of the vicereine, the silence (of her gazing at Juana) is marked.

For the vicereine, the scene is emotionally charged. Furthermore, she, who holds the point of view, witnesses this scene (for the spectator) as theatrically displayed. All of the explicit narrative and visual references to theatre are underlined by recourse in this sequence to a tableau effect. According to Brewster and Jacobs (1997, 76) tableaux provided (in early cinema) 'the suspension characteristic of the stage picture, where the action stops while its significance is presented'. This significance is often that of 'intense psychological dilemmas' (Ibid, 49). In the meeting between Juana and vicereine are qualities of suspended movement and of stillness. Firstly, the only real sense of physical movement within its frames is in the play of expressions on the protagonists' faces. Therefore, secondly, the long, visually-still takes as surely allow the emotional weight of their content to register as does the subtle play of expressions across firstly, the vicereine's shy but struggling face, and secondly, Juana's more open and confident one. Nevertheless, a major difference between theatrical tableaux and their use in early cinema was that even if the characters remained still within the frame, cinematic movements could and usually did

render tableaux dynamic. Bemberg keeps her camera still, rendering her tableau effect more pronounced.

The aural components of this scene work effectively with the imagery to suggest the dangers of a private space of love made integral with, and played out in, the public space of theatre and of convent. The exuberant noises of the players' laughter and chatting in the background (with a brief hint of baroque harpsichord music that reinforces a sense of period) are loudest in the first shot, and thereafter continuous but muted. These remind us of this nun's true space and remain audible when visually excluded by the tighter framing of close ups on Juana. Furthermore, in the orchestration of shots that move from a wider space of open quadrangle, to royal dias, to finally a series of close ups, an intense and almost uncomfortable (because public) intimacy is displayed. Working with this discomfort at exposure is its vulnerability to a more ominous closing in.²⁴

Otherwise, there is only one ambient sound and that is of the viceroy settling back into his chair as he turns from quoting some of Juana's lines to Puebla to face (looking out at us) Juana. This silence is part of the emotional charge of the scene.²⁵ In one close up, when the viceroy (off-screen) is praising her intelligence and beauty, Juana's silence echoes that of the vicereine. Thus the visual rhymes across the shots of Juana and vicereine have their aural counterparts. Nevertheless, these echoes most underline the disjunction, as in Miss Mary, between image seen and voice heard. Finally, when the women are heard, against their soft voices the quality of the Archbishop's whispered voice

²⁴ Such tensions of framing (when the private world erupts into a public space) are reminiscent of those accompanying Camila's dangerous statements of desire that are analysed in the earlier part of this chapter.

rasps as with, 'This isn't a convent; it's a bordello,' it closes the scene. Thus the joyful sounds of the players have worked against the sinister off-screen presence of the Archbishop, but also with it, to suggest two opposed world views.²⁶

Nevertheless, the vicereine's silence shouts loudest. That she has initially taken the reins from her husband by a confident quoting of Juana's poem, underlines not only a predisposition towards Juana (she knows her poems well), but more significantly, her falling in love (falling shy) as the scene unfolds.²⁷ Perhaps to this we may link an idea of Juana's own losing of confidence during this scene's progress. She dares to lecture the vicereine, but (we will see) with her eyes she does not dare to look her in the face. Here too, look and voice are mis-aligned in another moment of visual and vocal de-synchronisation. Moreover, analysis reveals an oddity about Juana's point of view. The vicereine always looks obliquely right to Juana, so that all cuts back from her to Juana are held in the vicereine's point of view. When, however, Juana answers her, 'There are few cultured women' (Fig.6.24), directly and confidently, with, 'Everywhere, sefiora,' (Fig.6.25), she is addressing, with a look to the left of screen, the viceroy with her look. Therefore, cuts back to the vicereine (for example, in Fig.6.26), are not from Juana's point of view. Such a misalignment (hence disorientation) of her look is underlined by the fact that when she first moves towards and takes up her final position facing them, Juana has once looked (in

²⁵ The emotive effect - melancholic and sexually-charged - of this silence is reminiscent of that in the first three films.

²⁶ We have always been aware of the Archbishop owing to one cut to him before Juana moved forward. In this he looked left to the space of the threesome's discussion of Juana's wit. Therefore, even within the more immediate environment of revelry discussed above, he remains off-screen as an ominous presence. The viceroy and vicereine may frame and 'protect' Juana (their relationship to her may be intimate and securing), but the wider framing is always menacing.

correct alignment) to the right of the screen (and shyly, or slyly?) to the vicereine.

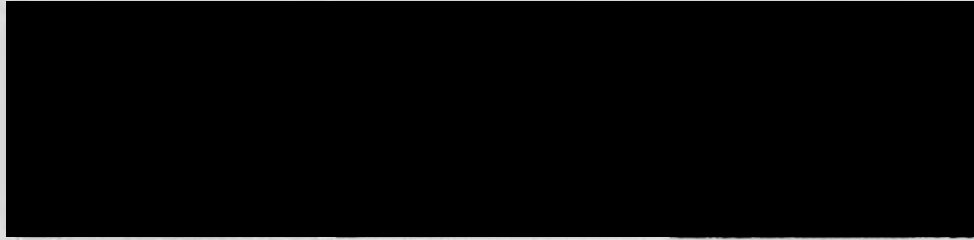


Fig.6.24

Fig.6.25

Fig.6.26

The viceroy sums up his impressions of Juana with, 'Beautiful, passionate, ironical.' The cutting around these words sums up and sews the trio together, as well as reinforces the sense already given of the women's fundamental silence. 'Beautiful' is off-screen to a shot on the vicereine who is assenting to this praise of Juana with a silent gaze towards her. 'Passionate' is on the happily smiling viceroy, and on 'Ironical' there is a cut to Juana, whose slight smile suggests absolute confidence and knowingness. Again, confident woman fits constructively with sanctified nun. It is impossible to disentangle analysis of this dialogue (and its staging in cuts between its three participants) from the relay of looks between them. This is a scene in which the vicereine falls in love with Juana. Accordingly, it is only the vicereine's point of view with which we are aligned. Point of view is linked to display of the loved one, of Sor Juana. This exposure is to a feeling gaze. The vicereine's break out into a final, very pleased, but silent smile, expresses real depth of feeling. (Juxtaposed with his

²⁷ Such shyness may explain why we later see her husband, and not the vicereine herself, reciting one of the poems that Juana has dedicated to her.

wife's intensity is the much easier geniality of the viceroy as expressed in his open smile.) Thus whilst it could be argued that the vicereine is given subjectivity here, it is a vulnerable subjectivity of falling. Neither subjectivity nor vulnerability is yet given to Juana, however.

The extracts examined from Miss Mary and Yo, la peor de todas have dealt in sexual play-acting and display, but have given to their socially powerless exponents and to the spectator's estimation of them, some sense of power. Thus such display feels more than just a frustrated response to a patriarchal positioning of them as objects, and thus Bemberg's delight in and play on their glamour is linked to a sense of women's strength in pre-feminist, and pre-second-wave feminist, worlds in, respectively, the case of the protagonist in Yo, la peor de todas, and the case of Perla in Miss Mary. At the same time, both Miss Mary and Yo, la peor de todas relate a problematic star-to-character fit to a complex point of view. Both films point to questions of desire between women - between the one displayed and the one who looks. Unlike Camila's direct gaze, neither character dare directly 'speak' her desire, just as each 'star', but barely, hides behind the role of either governess or nun. Bemberg's mis-casting is inspired and is doing more than just reconciling star image to character. In the first meeting between the female protagonists of Yo, la peor de todas, the problematic fit of sensual-yet-ascetic Serna as Sor Juana is on display (to the vicereine and to us). But at the peasants' wedding in Miss Mary, Christie as Miss Mary is played down by the lighting almost to the point of invisibility. Assumpta Serna is showcased, while Julie Christie is washed out. Such opposing formal treatments are appropriate to the rich connotations of their

respective problematic fits. Showcased star is looked at, and invisible star is looked for. Furthermore, showcased star has independent vision, but from her own vision, invisible star is estranged. Nevertheless, both characters are denied the controlling point of view in the scenes analysed. As the spectator is left in 'confusion' as to what she is seeing, so she is often further aurally distanced from any knowledge of its meaning either by silence, or by other voices that cannot 'speak' the image in front of her. In this sense, Bemberg's texts suggest Agnès Varda's notion of cinécriture as Flittermann Lewis (1990, 39) describes it. Cinécriture is a visual and aural discursive process which in its interweaving of multiple textual voices fractures the singular enunciative source and thereby emphasises contradiction. 'Confusion' and contradiction are central to the disinvestments of the gaze of its controlling power. They are made more necessary by the fact that Bemberg's gaze between women is not necessarily mutual in the sense of equal and reciprocal. This is especially clear in Yo, la peor de todas.

Nevertheless, the dislocations of the gaze also suggest that in these films we are witnessing the difficulty of the expression of desire between women. It is as if Bemberg's later texts cannot bear their own potentially-lesbian weight. The textual repressions and dislocations (principally in the point-of-view structuring) themselves render the quality of that desire erotic, in the sense that that is erotic which works by suggestion rather than is explained. At the same time, it would appear that narratively at least, there is a distinction to be made between Miss Mary's desire for Brando's heterosexually expressed desire, and the more overtly-lesbian desire of at least the vicereine for Sor Juana. Thus Bemberg's

construction of the gaze is clearly differentiated between the films and becomes increasingly complex, as she constructs different kinds of desiring not only between women but within each one.

However Bemberg's later film practice problematises all feminist film theory (heterosexual and lesbian), it suggests many more than the polarised masculine/feminine desiring positions of Mulvey's Freudian arguments. Thus it accords more nearly with that feminist film criticism, notably lesbian, which takes critical issue with Mulvey's theories. In essentialising the masculine, in other words, making their own heterosexual assumptions about masculine desire and against them measuring and essentialising all that pertains to the feminine, these theories close down speculation as to the multiple and mobile possibilities of femininity and feminine sexuality that a disorientated gaze in Bemberg's films appears to explore. Furthermore, in her women's flaunted sexuality, Bemberg also challenges Mulvey's more prescriptive (1975) call for a textual distancing by foregrounding the viewing process. Bemberg's later cinema is one that both disrupts the re-enactment of pleasure, in that often she dislocates the gaze, but that also relies on it, in that the screen images of her women are always central and highly sexualised. By dislocating the gaze only when it occurs between women, however, she not only both prevents the objectification of one in a domination/submission pattern and fractures the 'knowing' of them even while they are displayed to female desire, but problematises that desire.

Conclusion

Mulvey's (1975) model of a passive female spectator is refuted within the diegesis of Bemberg's films, where the female is always actively looking and speaking her desires. The female gaze in Bemberg's films begins as a heterosexual one. Camila's finding of the priest and then her holding of him with her gaze makes explicit the question of the inscription of female desire and the related representation of a male object of desire. She looks and he is looked at. But this he cannot bear. Whilst instability of the look is made a feature of, thereby anticipating, the later films, here it is a man who cannot bear the look of a woman. That look that he cannot bear is straightforwardly heterosexual. In Bemberg's later films, the gaze is articulated between women. But if she accords the woman a Medusa-like stare at the heterosexual object of her choice (Camila), she dislocates her and thus the spectator's vision when she is looking at another woman (Miss Mary and Sor Juana). There are eyeline mis-matches, and expectations set up by what appear to be point-of-view shots are frustrated. Thus the female gaze - articulated through strange and multiple positionings as it is - seems to be emanating from complex positions of desire, which cannot be marked as 'straightforwardly' lesbian. We may conclude that Bemberg's authorial signature comprises a presentation of heterosexual love in a new way, and an exploration and construction of many different and sexually-complex kinds of relationships between women.

At the same time, all five of Bemberg's films analysed above refuse the spectator knowledge, and therefore 'possession' of their female protagonists. Bemberg's 'disembodiments' of women work in subtle ways. Firstly, the

spectator is denied any verbal explanation of them. In the first three films, there are not obvious formal disruptions to the female voice, but disruptions are there all the same. There are the long silences accompanying their images that suggest that her women refuse containment. Music more often than voiced thoughts counterpoints the images of women. It is Miss Mary and Yo, la peor de todas, however, which most answer Silverman's call (1984) for a disjunction between image seen and voice heard, so that the idea of woman cannot be contained, known and thereby possessed. Thus, secondly, when women look at women, complete control of the gaze is denied. Complete control would allow (women) spectators the problematic power (made doubly problematic when the object of desire is another woman) that is involved in relations of looking. Finally, therefore, Bemberg does not present the kind of mutual gazing between women (set in motion by the mother-child relationship, and concerned with the maintenance and development of relationships, rather than with the acquisition and proving of power) that either Ann Kaplan (1983) or Jackie Byars (1988) call for. Bemberg makes a problem of all power relations that are bound up in the look, at the same time that through both dislocated voice and look her films resist final definition and delimitation of the nature of the female voice, either of her female characters or of hers as director. In these ways Bemberg displays, but does not exploit, her stars.

The lavishness of the mise-en-scène and the flamboyance of her women are what make Bemberg's films pleasurable yet 'disturbing' to the feminist eye.²⁸ In that the other woman looked at is displayed and spectacularised, Bemberg's

²⁸ I take this idea from Judith Mayne (1991, 106) when she implies that female authorship is something that should disturb.

texts admit and unravel the issue of pleasure.²⁹ Thus are Bemberg's texts disruptive and thus the character of her authorial signature is a defiant delighting in visual pleasure. It remains to be examined how Bemberg is disruptive in her handling of pleasure in her last film, De eso no se habla. Here the women are hyper-feminine to the point of parody, whilst the woman-to-woman address continues; the tender (if tense) mother-daughter bonding is complicated by the mother's desires; where the overt romantic matter, however, is once again heterosexual, the object of male desire is 'different' in an entirely different way. Bemberg therefore moves through and beyond the lesbian call for multiple-subject positionings and identification/connections between women (in Miss Mary and Yo, la peor de todas), to re-negotiate heterosexual ones (in De eso no se habla). Whilst such textual enunciations do sit happier with the more complex model of subject positionings that lesbian criticism calls for, a heterosexual reading of these positions would allow for a further reading:

Chapter Seven will discuss connections other than just the erotic - something other or more than lesbian love - between the women in Bemberg's final film.

²⁹ E. Ann Kaplan (1983, 30) suggests that all screen images of women (no matter what within them women may be doing) have been sexualized. Bemberg does not seem to have challenged such sexualisation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Feminine Excess: Luisina Brando, Costume and Mise-en-Scène in *De eso*

no se habla

Introduction

The previous chapter measured Bemberg's practice against theories of feminist film practice. It considered Bemberg's construction of the gaze between women, both within the diegesis and across the screen to the spectator, and suggested that the quality of her (female-gendered) gaze involved delighting in visual pleasure, and that this was gained - from Miss Mary onwards - by looking at beautiful, sometimes flamboyant, women. Bemberg's glamorous and lavishly-dressed women crystallize in the vivacious figure of Luisina Brando, whose performance of femininity as Doña Leonor in Bemberg's final costume drama De eso no se habla now reaches an 'excess' beyond the melodramatic 'excess' that Chapter Three saw 'speak' in Camila and Yo, la peor de todas. Thus this last chapter concentrates its analysis on Luisina Brando the actress, and her performance as Doña Leonor. In so doing, it compares Brando's performance of femininity to that of Charlotte (the hidden protagonist of De eso no se habla) by examining their performances and costumes for what they display and what they hide. Analyses will elucidate how such displays and 'masquerades' construct a transgressive femininity that makes its address to other women within and beyond the screen. Thus the chapter continues Chapter Six's examination of a 'mise-en-scène of femininity' at which the spectator is

looking (or not), and its questions of the quality - erotic or otherwise - of the spectator's pleasure.

De eso no se habla completes the trajectory of Bemberg's costume dramas from the 'historical' to the 'fantastic.' Whilst Chapter Three has shown that there is a kind of search for a (feminist revisionary) 'truth' in her earlier historical films, Bemberg's last film would appear to be foregrounding history as story, as make-believe, so that what constitutes 'truth' and what constitutes fantasy mutually question each other. Doña Leonor indulges her fantasies in a more and more extravagant 'dressing up' until actual fashion has been left behind. (Analyses of Argentine fashion to which the period of the film refers will elucidate this point.) That the question of fantasy as opposed to 'truth' is made explicit through costume therefore makes explicit the questions around Brando's performance - and Bemberg's display of - a constructed femininity. In particular, the excesses of Brando's costume put on show some feminist film theoretical questions around masquerade as fabrication. Thus this chapter asks how in this film Brando pre-empts a voyeuristic gaze and how our laughter at her feminine excesses is made subversive rather than reactionary. It considers glamour/masquerade as a strategy through which a male gaze may be emasculated, and whether in analysing as well as celebrating it, Bemberg's direction both points this strategy up, and reinforces the woman-to-woman address that this thesis has identified in the performance and witness of Bemberg's feminine protagonists. The answers to such questions will throw further light on the nature of Bemberg's transgressive filmmaking practices.

1. The Mise-en-Scène of Femininity: Luisina Brando and Argentine

Fashion

The expressive Luisina Brando was Bemberg's favourite actress. She is stereotypically 'feminine' in that she has a reasonably curvaceous figure and abundant thick dark brown hair. She is a physical actress who, as Bemberg says (in Los Andes, Mendoza, 25 April 1982), 'moves herself like a cat in front of the camera.' Moreover, she has a mobile face, whose dark eyes especially, combine with her physical features, deep, husky voice and graceful movements and gestures to suggest rather than a simmering, a flaunted, sensuality. Brando also moves easily between the stage, television, and film, and quickly between comic and tragic registers. Her curriculum vitae demonstrates her versatility. Starting out, in the 1960s, Brando was a television comic actress with Pepe Biondi.¹ After some serious, comic and musical roles in the theatre, she moved into film where - up to 1993 - she played in films by many distinguished Argentine directors. In all of these films she plays a sexually-vibrant woman (notwithstanding that this vibrancy is somewhat muted in Señora de Nadie). In all contemporary reviews, Brando gets the highest praise for her role in Señora de Nadie, where one critic spells out that 'She has never been better' (La Plata, Buenos Aires, 29 November 1981). Before her prize for Best Actress for her role in Señora de Nadie, Brando had already won four awards, two of them Best Actress Awards, one for the stage and one for film. These were serious awards for serious roles: The Molière Prize (1977-8) for her role in Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie, and The Best Actress Award from the Critics Association of Argentina (1979) for her role in Sergio Renan's Sentimental (Argentina,

¹ Biondi is a famous Argentine comedian.

1979). Brando, however, is little known outside Argentina. Neither is she amongst Argentina's top-noted actresses.²

To the question why she thought that Brando was somewhat neglected by Argentine critics, Clara Fontana responded that she was 'a very good actress' but, type-cast to the lower middle class.³ Fontana pointed to the roles - Perla in Miss Mary and Doña Leonor in De eso no se habla - that (even) Bemberg made her play. In all her roles by other (male) filmmakers, Brando plays a vulgar, lower-middle-class woman.⁴ Nevertheless, it is symptomatic of Brando's type-castness that Fontana seems to forget the role - of a middle-class housewife who leaves her husband on discovering his many infidelities - played by her in Señora de Nadie. In this film (we have seen) Bemberg encourages emotional subtleties in Brando's acting. According to Graciela Galán (the wardrobe designer on De eso no se habla), Bemberg worked tirelessly on her actors' gestures. In Brando, Bemberg brought out a gravitas (which is nowhere in evidence in Brando's film roles either before or after her work with Bemberg).⁵

² Because of this, and because there seems to be no systematic appraisal of 'stars' in Argentina, it is difficult to get a sense of Brando's image and persona. Brando has an entry in the dictionary of Argentine actresses. This is not, however, a distinction in itself, as a dictionary can be presumed to list all known actresses. In the few books that there are of actresses she is not mentioned. There is so little documented information concerning her that it becomes a question of trying to piece things together. Much of my sense of her persona has been gleaned from what my interviewees called *chismes*/rumour or gossip.

³ Clara Fontana (Buenos Aires, 4 September 2000).

⁴ Brando's type-casting becomes clearer when she appears alongside her more 'distinguished' co-stars, for example, Graciela Dufau (with whom in the 1970s and 1980s she often acted).

⁵ Currently, Brando appears on Buenos Aires television (Canal Azul/Blue Channel) every evening in the soap opera with music, Los buscados de siempre/The Eternal Search. Brando plays a middle-aged, middle-class woman. Her mobile face - moving easily between registers of emotion - is recognizable from Bemberg's films, but here it is somehow bland, expressing no energy or direction. Lita Stantic (Buenos Aires, 24 August 2000) and Mercedes García Guevara (Buenos Aires, 31 August 2000) suggested that Bemberg really brought something out in Brando, and refined her. This is evidenced by the comparison of a Brando performance in one of Bemberg's films with that in a contemporary Argentine film. In Fernando Ayala's El año del conejo/Year of the Rabbit (1987), Pepe (Federico Luppi) encourages Norma (Brando) to have a breast implant in the hope of spicing up their love life. This does not work. They separate. Norma becomes a successful business-woman and meets up again with her husband. Now their

Such gravitas is made clear immediately the film opens. Earlier analysis of Doña Leonor's repressive subjectivity in the film's opening sequence saw that the bedroom scene is split into two components (into both of which her memories of her daughter Charlotte's second birthday party interject). In the first component, Doña Leonor is gazing at herself in the three-way mirror. In the second component she has moved to her bed, from which she gets up, moving towards and down a corridor, before putting a coat over her negligee and leaving the house. The placing here of Doña Leonor within her *mise-en-scène* will now be analysed in closer detail to exemplify the feminine refinement and gravitas that Bemberg makes Brando bring to her role.

After the credits is a cut (in silence) to a close up of a glass dish on a dressing

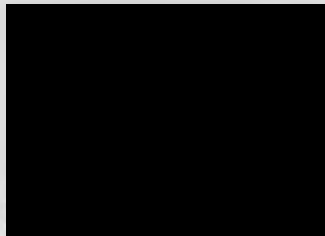


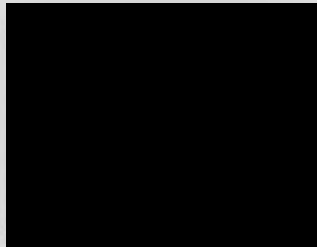
table: Fig.7.1

We are in a middle-class home,

where everything is in its place (behind the casket, the items of ornamentation

love life improves. As the plot outline intimates, the tone of this film is vulgar. Accordingly, Brando's performance reinforces a brash *mise-en-scène*. This is exemplified in an early scene in which Brando is getting ready for bed and arguing with her husband. In the entire scene Brando moves and holds herself in a brittle way. She is shot from behind and reflected (as at the beginning of *De eso no se habla*) face-on in a three-way mirror. (Perhaps *De eso no se habla*'s opening presents a direct quotation of this mirror.) In Ayala's mirror, Brando is never so tightly framed as in Bemberg's film. Thus Ayala's screen takes in a wider *mise-en-scène*. This is dominated in the foreground by a messy array of objects on Brando's dressing table. At one point Brando's reflection shows her holding her head upwards in a gesture that reinforces the raise of her eyes to heaven. Now her eyes (like her head) do not move, so that her stare, arrogant and harsh, is of a piece with the rough way in which she will brush her loose, long hair and with the brittle timbre of her voice. Finally, she slaps cold cream on her face in a coarse gesture. Apart from the raise of her eyes to heaven, she does not take her eyes off herself. In Bemberg's film (Chapters Four and Five have seen), Brando has been made more subtly communicative of complex (tender as well as spiteful) emotions. Patricia Maldonado (Buenos Aires, 29 August 2000) suggested that Bemberg was 'cross with Brando for failing to thank her for making her a great actress.' It would appear that (the usually modest) Bemberg was justified.

and brushes etc. catch some light, are decoratively arranged and suggest some degree of wealth). The clutter of beads into the dish suggests discord, however. The camera pans away from the dish, upwards and to the right, along her arm, bringing into mid-close-up and into the right half of the frame, the profile of a middle-aged woman (Brando). As the camera moves up to the woman's face, the subdued diegetic light of dressing-table lamps is displaced by shadows whilst remaining in the outline of her hair and on her forehead. An indistinct reflection of her in the mirror is occluded as she bends her head down and



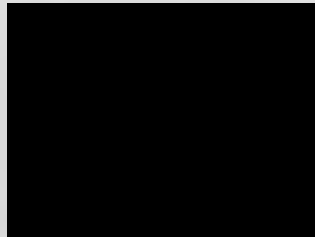
further into the frame: **Fig7.2**

The effect

underlines her expression as a woman in mental pain. Brando's hair is scraped back from her forehead, and at the mirror she is mostly still. When she moves, her face (like the camera) moves slowly. At first, the camera does not move other than to zoom in to frame her sad face more tightly. Eventually, the camera pulls back, ninety degrees to the right and behind, to reveal her in an over-the-shoulder, middle-distance shot reflected three ways in the mirror that she faces. Now revealed, her simple but classic black dress with white collar, works with the drab and heavy colours of the *mise-en-scène* (seen in Fig.7.2 as perpendicular lines in soft browns to the left) to suggest oppression. To the fluid and slow motion of the camera pulling back (augmenting its evocation of a grave tone and a somber mood, whilst introducing an air of strange magic), a deep and quiet male voice impinges on the silence. This voice is replaced (once again) by a silence that accompanies the camera's closer move to the image of

Dofia Leonor (still reflected three times in the mirror). The camera rests on her inscrutable expression for five seconds. This subdued mise-en-scène is abruptly obliterated with the change of scene to the children's party (so that two mise-en-scènes of femininity are contrasted by the first two images of the sequence). Now there is a shot in bright outside light of four whispering women in-line and face-on to the camera. The primary colours are accompanied by sounds of festivity and of children laughing. This shot works as a shock cut from (or replacement to) the previous shot of Dofia Leonor at her mirror: The composition echoes in its co-ordinates of the four women in the middle distance almost exactly those of Dofia Leonor reflected three times in her mirror. The camera holds still for three seconds against a continuous backdrop of low sounds of whispering, and the harsh sounds of one party popper.

In the scene's second bedroom component, Brando in an elegant long black negligee sleeps on a shiny, deep red eiderdown. Her prone body is picked out by a white light shining from above to frame her black torso and naked arms and



shoulders sensuously: **Fig.7.3**

This sensuous

lighting of her body continues as Brando's movements direct the camera off the bed, towards the wardrobe and into the corridor. Before she moves into the corridor she briefly disappears from the frame,

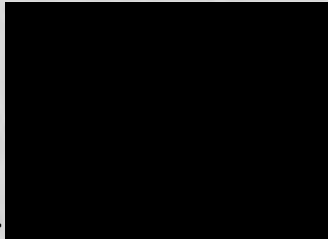
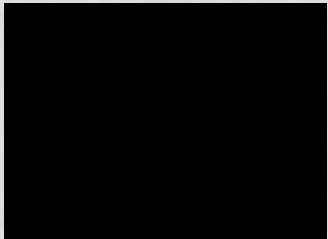
Fig.7.4  so that now the corridor suggests a vacancy underlined by a subdued lighting effect. The geometric and perpendicular lines of doorframes and windows with which the corridor is lined suggests an enclosure and entrapment of that vacancy. The camera waits for Brando to come back into the space before it follows her down the corridor, witnessing a heavy grace in her movements in which are nonetheless intimations of flourish, especially in the way in which she walks. Once framed mid-distance in the corridor, she puts on her coat with one fluid, graceful movement of it over her shoulders, before she swivels on her heel and swings through the door:

Fig.7.5  This action is quietly excessive in its repressed vigorous movement and rhymes the action in the party scene where Brando enters the frame with the same flourish to remind one mother that - whereas that mother refuses to admit that her own child is 'handicapped' - that mother's child, being deaf, cannot hear her. This rivalry between the two mothers has reinforced the comic tone of the party that so contrasts with the sadness expressed in Doña Leonor's bedroom. The combination of comic flourish with expression of deep grief involves us sympathetically with Doña Leonor. That Bemberg's direction refines with grace (and sadness) Brando's natural liveliness is thus seen early on in De eso no se habla. This is an

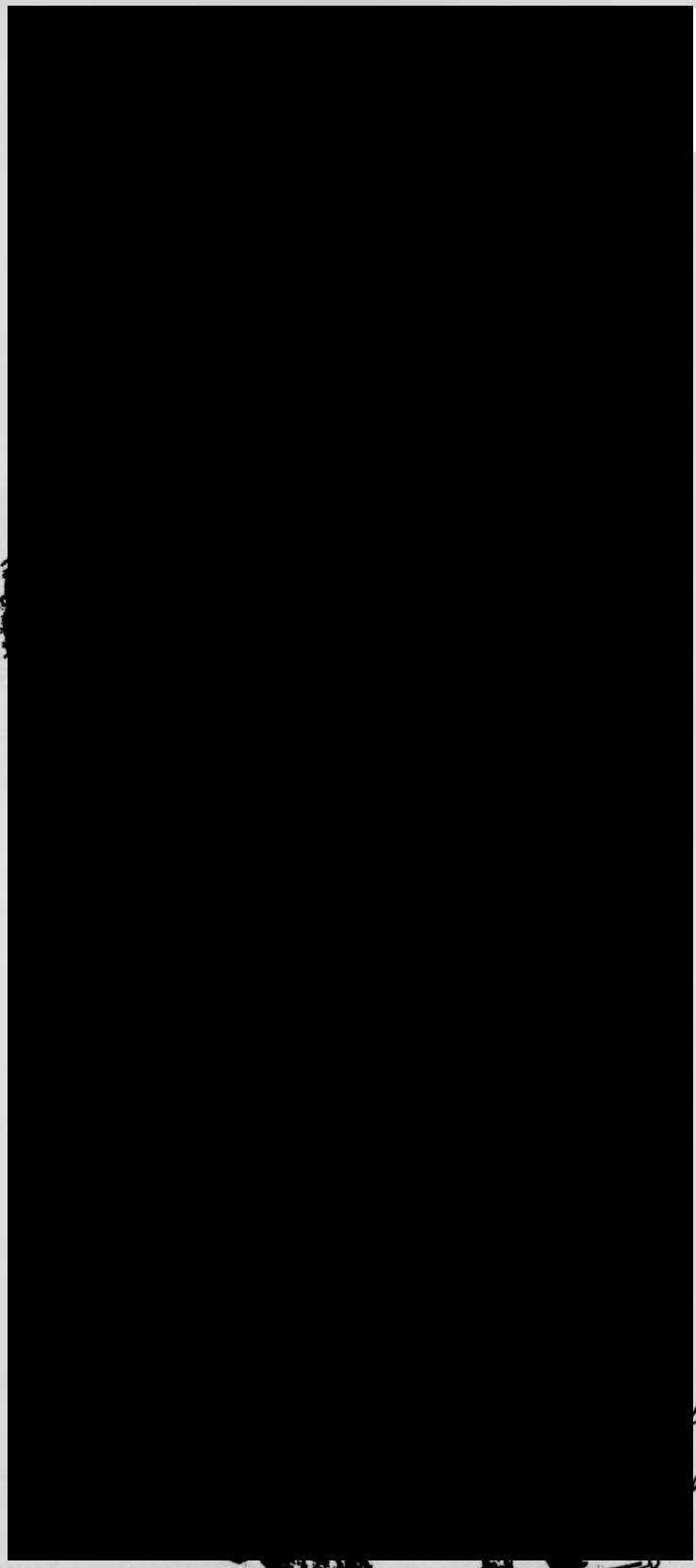
important point. Although I argue below that costume is used comically by Bemberg (especially in the hyper-feminising of her female protagonists), its use is towards the utterance of serious, even tragic statements.

Doña Leonor soon will reveal herself to be a coquettish and socially-aspiring woman, however. The tender, complex grief of Bemberg's opening is set to be the foil to an increasing excess of costume and gesture with which Doña Leonor clothes and expresses herself. Such excess reaches its apogee in a glorious blue dress in which she first appears towards the end of the film. As 'excess' and fantasy are vital to Bemberg's construction of Brando's *mise-en scène*, she chose a wardrobe designer who prefers to imagine rather than imitate.⁶ Galán's play with the 'make-believe' of what is both feminine and fashionable is made clear when we situate *De eso no se habla* - a film that progresses through three decades: the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s - within its period of Argentine fashion. The greater part of the narrative of the latter film is situated in the 1930s. These were the times before mass production when, at the same time that Argentine classes could be easily distinguished by their dress, there was a freer expression of idiosyncrasy.⁷ The Argentine fashion journalist, Susana Saulquín (1997, 226), says, 'A large proportion of women of the highest classes ... dressed for other women, to demonstrate their superiority.' Bound up with such snobbery and aspiration is envy, all of which character traits we see feeding into Doña Leonor's ideas of fashion.⁸ Furthermore, in the film, the fantasy of competition

⁶ Galán (Buenos Aires, 2 September 2000) stated her preference for designing for the opera, for which, 'as the art form least rooted in reality,' she can use her fantasy.

⁷ 'Economic development caused a multi-class system, in which fashion closely intimated the prestige of class' (Saulquín 1997, 72).

⁸ Saulquín (1997, 192) suggests that envy is particularly a part of the Argentine's Spanish inheritance: 'It must be said that some of the basic ingredients of fashion, such as imitation,



in picelle
f re

Fig. 7.6: Galán's Grotesque Fantasy Dresses Charlotte Before Her Time

that is fed by envy, spirals. According to Galán, Doña Leonor gets more exaggerated as the film progresses, because the situation - Charlotte is growing older, but not growing - is getting more desperate. Thus she dresses Charlotte (as in Fig.7.6) in a more and more 'out-doing' way.⁹ She is to be the best señora burguesa there is. This 'grotesque' fantasy exceeds itself in two dresses. Firstly, is Doña Leonor's choice (for Charlotte) of frothy white wedding dress. The baroque excesses of this dress lie in the layers of white froth through which decorative surfaces Charlotte is hidden. 'Tender' though this dress is, it obliterates Charlotte as an individual, as in:

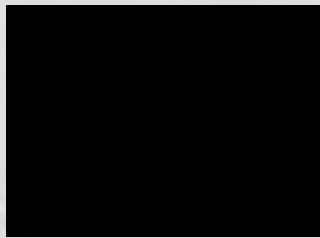


Fig.7.7

Nevertheless, that it is tender is

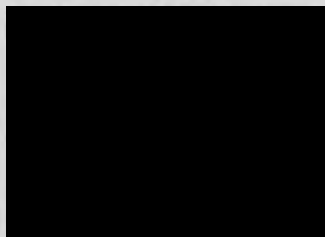
exemplified next to Doña Leonor's blue dress (first seen as in Fig.7.8) which, secondly, representing her own best at her beloved Charlotte's wedding, is worn assertively.

Analysis of the sequence in which we first see the blue dress - as Doña Leonor finishes preparations for her daughter's wedding - will exemplify the sensual qualities both of its texture and of those of Brando's performance within it. The sequence begins with a mid-distance shot of Charlotte's white nightgown laid out on the bridal bed. From this is a cut to Brando in mid-close-up, behind a wedding cake. The camera pulls back to reveal a shiny blue dress, in whose

emulation and a little bit of envy (which as Buñuel says, is the "Spanish vice par excellence") constitutes our inheritance.'

⁹ Photocopy of original design provided by Graciela Galán.

contradictions the comedy of the scene is immediately established. It is gloriously puffy but cut around the cleavage so that Dofia Leonor is at once power-dressed and sexy. Her extravagant white hat is sloped coquettishly on



one side: **Fig.7.8**

Now her actions begin a

comedy of incongruity. She looks around to establish that she is alone, reaches forward, takes the sugar bride and groom off the cake and - dressed so glamorously as she thinks she is - stuffs them vulgarly into her mouth:

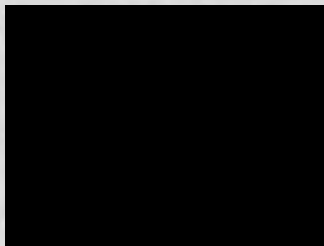


Fig.7.9

When Mohamé enters into the right of

the frame the shiny quality of her dress - upon which extra lighting has been thrown - stands out against his drab brown suit:

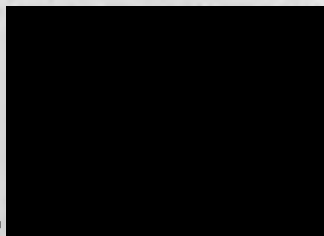


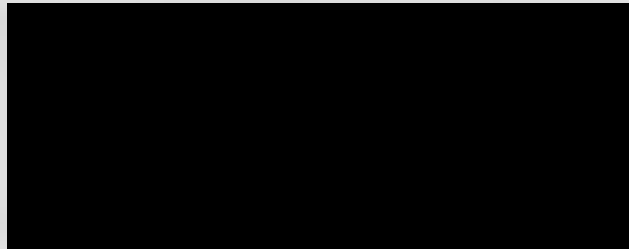
Fig.7.10

Mohamé has entered to call her away to

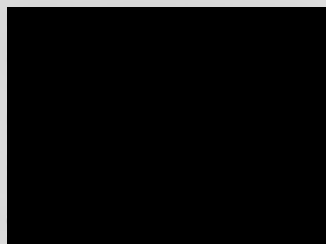
visit the sick mayor (Jorge Luz). She rushes off - desperate to persuade the mayor to accompany Charlotte up the aisle. As the camera tracks her running to the mayor's house it (only) gradually moves back from close-up (Fig.7.11) to reveal the sensuous curves (picked out by the material's shiny quality) of her

body (Fig.7.12). The shine picks out so clearly the slippery texture of the material that our visual experience of it is made tactile. Doña Leonor's dress is thus showcased in a strategy (slow revelation by the camera) that defers (visual and tactile) spectator pleasure, which strategy in turn plays up suggestions of the complicity between actress and director. Meanwhile, Doña Leonor is struggling to swallow the bride and groom, but her desperate wish to maintain propriety is indicated in her attempt to walk, not run, and to hold her hat on, so that the total effect is sensuous and comic:

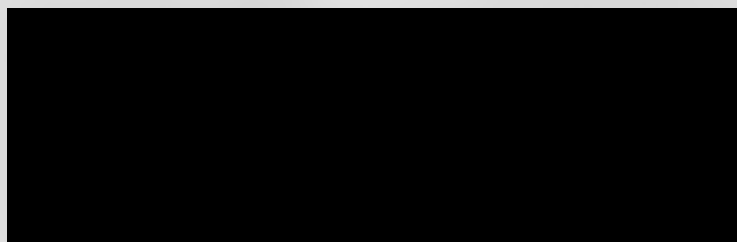
Figs.7.11 & 7.12



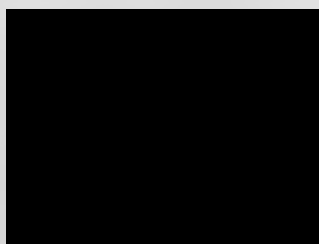
Once in the mayor's sick room Doña Leonor acts the part of coquette. Even as she approaches up the side of the mayor's bed, she is sidling. She is in control again and in motivating the camera's movements she displays herself in three actions to the spectator across the screen: In the first of these actions, the camera follows Brando's arm - made sensuous by a light rippling along her muscles - as it reaches from left to right across the screen to stroke the mayor's head. The next cut gives us a full-frontal view right down Doña Leonor's cleavage, as she whines in a voice that enjoys its own authority (underlined by its deep masculine tones):

Fig.7.13

As the next cuts confirm that this sighting of Brando's cleavage is firstly from the crippled mayor's point of view (Fig.7.14), and then from that of his fey assistant (Martin Kalwill in Fig.7.15), the spectator point of view is made impotent:

**Fig.7.14****Fig.7.15.**

The second action begins when Doña Leonor agrees to take the mayor to the toilet. At this point a comic music begins which both dramatises her putting on a role, and dramatizes her own consciousness of a situation so ridiculous, whilst her dress remains so glorious, that the effect is of a fantastic 'grotesque.' The exaggerated gestures in which Brando rights the mayor's hat and appraises it for

**effect, Fig.7.16**

suggest her awareness of audience. She further shows a consciousness of the camera as, thirdly, she moves directly into and towards its lens; placing her backside against it (Fig.7.17), she places herself up against Bemberg's camera, before swaying

down the corridor (Fig.7.18) along the trajectory of its view (Fig.7.19) in which only the blue dress shines out:

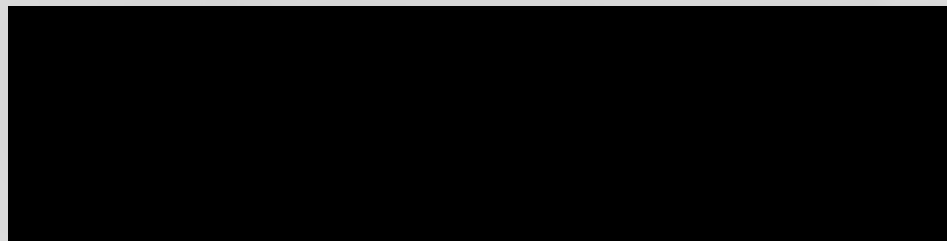


Fig.7.17

Fig.7.18

Fig.7.19.¹⁰

The excessive sumptuousness of costuming is so enjoyed here (an unusual effect by a feminist director) that it effaces our awareness of any other mise-en-scène.¹¹ Doña Leonor's swaying action indicates her knowing enjoyment of effect. She also gets what she wants: the mayor agrees to accompany Charlotte up the aisle. At the same time, Doña Leonor's blue dress confirms how it was the middle classes in 1930s' Argentina who had more psychological space (as

¹⁰ Such a sensual performance answers a French feminist call to women to speak with their bodies. Nicole Ward Jouve (1991, 83) quotes Hélène Cixous: 'If you censor the body, the breath, you are censoring speech. Write yourself: the body must be heard.'

¹¹ A measure of Bemberg's sensuous wit in her use of dress (and its placing within the mise-en-scène) can be gauged by comparing her work in the costume drama to that of other (albeit selective) woman directors. In *Mrs. Dalloway* (United Kingdom, 1997), Marleen Gorris - like Bemberg - uses costume (sometimes wittily) to celebrate feminine beauty. Nevertheless, Gorris' wit of costume is of a subtler kind than Bemberg's. *Mrs. Dalloway* has a scene that features glorious hats. This occurs in the flat of Septimus - the shell-shocked soldier returned from the war. Septimus' wife is making beautifully-coloured and fancy hats. Septimus tries one on. This provides a comic moment in which (in close-up) he looks at his wife and says, affectionately, that she has triumphed. Nevertheless, he proceeds to kill himself. In another scene (with the older Mrs. Dalloway), hats similarly focus the protagonist's sad thoughts. As she lays her hat on the bed, she says, 'It's all over for me.' There is furthermore something 'tasteful' (rather than wild) about Mrs. Dalloway's simple pale green dress which matches a pastel mise-en-scène, so that her clothes do not stand out against it, working instead towards the film's quiet melancholy. Fitting with this tone is the overall hue of the film. Shot in pale colours, even the young, more vibrant Clarissa (always dressed in white and shot in a translucent light) is quietly displayed.

The comparative 'loudness' of Bemberg's costumes however, is more extraordinary when we examine the costume drama of a female filmmaker whom - as a non-feminist - we might expect to play up a flaunting (to men). Diane Kurys' *Les enfants du siècle/The Children of The Century* (France, 1999) concerns the love life of the woman writer, George Sand (Juliette Binoche). One scene (in which Binoche is examining her red velvet dress in the mirror, prior to making an entrance at a party) provides very well an opportunity for wit, possibilities of texture and loud dressing which is not seized. Binoche is displayed in mid-long-shot, but with no expressive use of lighting to highlight any sumptuousness, either of her or of her attire. Consequently the camera sees no need to linger over this moment, although presumably the

well as just enough wealth) for a wider expression of fashion. Saulquín (1994, 187) says that 'The high classes tended to the conservative because threatened by upward mobility, whilst the lower classes tended through economic insecurity to imitation and to uniformity.' It was women in the middle classes who 'dressed themselves for themselves, out of pure pleasure in dress and to affirm themselves' (Saulquín 1994, 226).

The two classes in which Bemberg is interested are the middle one to which Brando's snobbish character belongs and the upper one to which she aspires. Upper-class women traveling between Britain, France and Buenos Aires, had an important influence on upper-class fashions in Buenos Aires, which became dedicated to high couture.¹¹ However, according to Galán, aspiring, snobbish and middle-class women will have got their own fashion ideas from magazines which were six to seven years behind Europe. Furthermore, the women in this film are from a poor small town. Consequently it would be even more 'behind' than is Buenos Aires. So with poorer cloth than their middle-class counterparts could get in Buenos Aires, and with some exercise of fantasy, these snobbish women will have got their dressmakers to make them up as they imagined the socially and fashionably eminent of the metropolis to dress. This was something that Bemberg and Galán were keen to portray (which suggests that inflecting their fondness is their own upper-class laughter at these women, and therefore an ambivalence). About this laughter, Galán's method of research and design is revealing. She confirmed that all fashion designs for Brando (and for the other

protagonist is examining herself for markers of luxuriousness. The rich use of colour - dispersed across the *mise-en-scène* - further detracts from focus on the woman.

¹¹ Until 1947 there was a liberal importation of French, English and Italian clothes into Argentina (Saulquín 1997, 72).

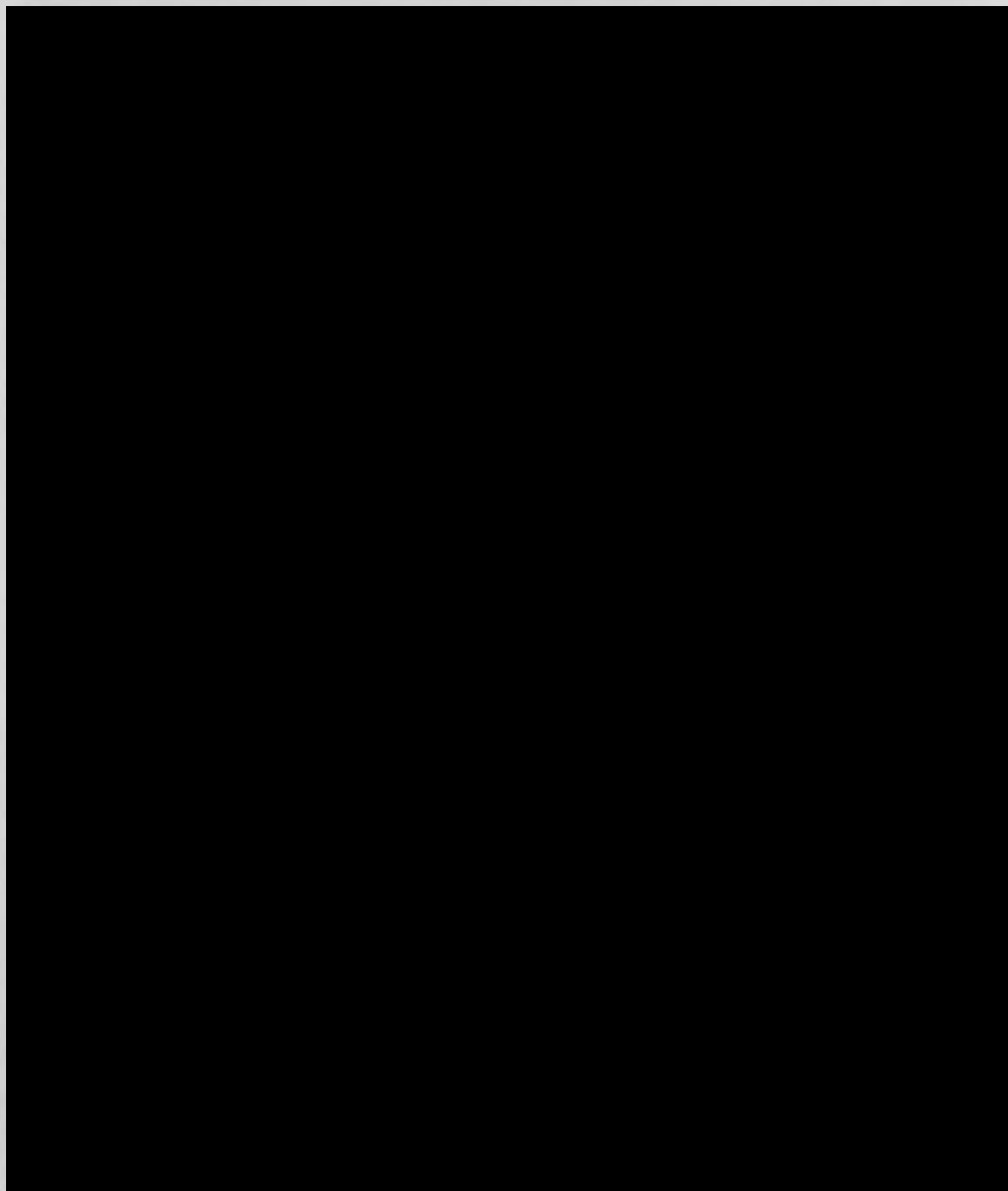


Fig. 7.20:

Chabela

actors in the film) are based on primary documentation. In Buenos Aires she scoured the San Telmo Sunday antiques market for magazines of the 1930s, mainly Para Ti. She also looked at Chabela (although Chabela is of the 1950s) as well as at photographs of the 1920s and 1930s.¹² She adapted one design (Fig.7.21) from Chabela (Fig.7.20) for Doña Leonor's white and red dress with the magnificent white collar.¹³ Fig.7.21 reveals Galán's comic exaggerations. Furthermore, in the film the bright red (like the blue) of Doña Leonor's dress is heightened.¹⁴

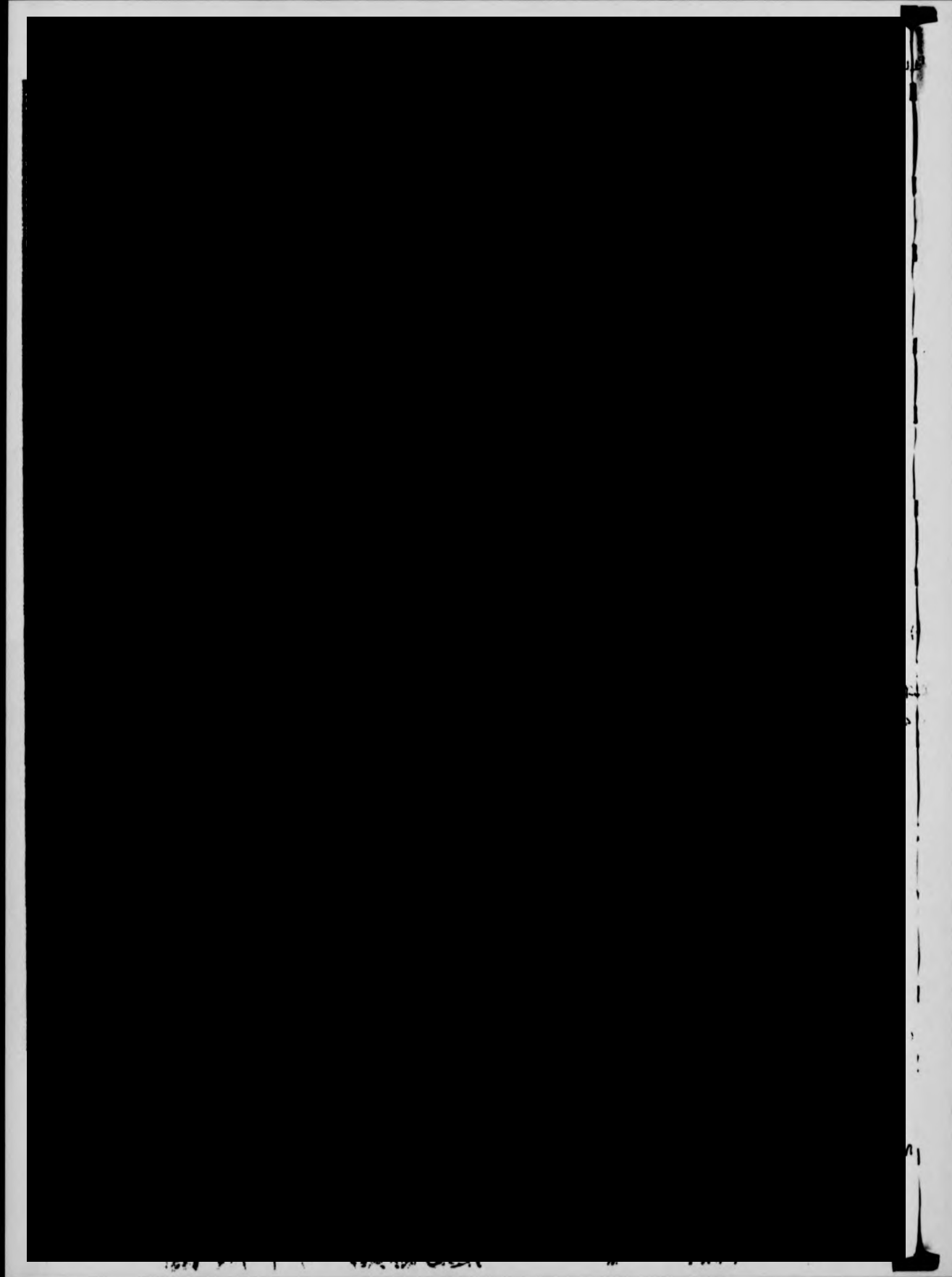
Bemberg's 1990s' film would also carry the connotations of a 1940s' and 1950s' vulgarity that the upper classes associated with Eva Perón and her social aspirations.¹⁵ Evita's publicized tour to Europe in 1947 shows a restrained

¹² It is important to note that of the very few documentary surveys of fashion extant in Argentina Galán did not consult them. Nevertheless they confirm Galán's comments regarding middle-class women's creative fantasising about fashion.

¹³ Galán (Buenos Aires, 2 September 2000) discussed and showed me her designs for Brando in De eso no se habla (Fig.7.21) and in Miss Mary. I was also able to find some of the reviews on which these designs (as in Fig.7.20) were based. The photocopy of the original, and of the adapted design, are supplied by Galán. Note that although the photocopy does not include details of issue, Chabela is a magazine from the 1950s. Was this Galán's own fantasy of period therefore?

¹⁴ With reference to Jameson's theory (1998, 93-135) of heightened colour that irritates the eye (in magical-realist films) it could be argued that Bemberg does not so much heighten colour in an 'irritating' way, as hand over the function of fantasising about colour (and fashion) to the female characters in the film. Whilst in Doña Leonor, these fantasies get wilder and more garish as the film proceeds, her flamboyance is to be distinguished from those moments in the film, washed in a gentle blue, and associated principally with Mastroianni.

¹⁵ Eva Duarte (1919-1952) - a radio actress - first came to prominence in 1945 in her marriage to Colonel Juan Perón who was elected President the following February. From her marriage onwards she devoted her self and image to a man and la fe peronista - the Peronist faith. When she became the First Lady, she began the redefinition of her image whose star glamour now became inseparable from her role as a politician. Now her costumes were designed by - amongst others - Van Cleef & Arpels and Christian Dior. With her extended and highly publicized tour to Europe in 1947 (Time magazine, unsympathetic to Peronism, nevertheless assigned a reporter to cover the tour and featured her on its cover), her image was refined and her transformations completed. She traveled with her own photographer, hairdresser and the head seamstresses from Henriette and Naletoff, the couture houses that designed her wardrobe. Today, critics and lay people alike talk of her 'performances.' An example of her manipulation of the media was her alleged order to withhold the release of a film in which she starred eponymously as La prodiga/The Prodigal Woman (Mario Soffici, Argentina, 1945). As a bizarre measure of her media success she has since her death been continually 'discovered' by Broadway and Hollywood, and she is internationally famous.



elegance in which nonetheless the hat signifies an excess of glamour (Fig. 7.22). Trailed by the paparazzi and dominating the public scene like no-one before her, this 'poor girl from the sticks' constructed a particular kind of femininity - one that, 'possible' to the socially aspiring, was risible to those who, threatened by her embrace of the poor, considered themselves of an already superior class. By the time she returned from Europe in August 1947, she had polished her appearance. Still the hats (as in Fig. 7.29) feature excess, with which, paradoxically, poor women identified.¹⁶ Brando's character - whilst middle-class - carries these connotations in that she too is socially aspiring and not quite 'the real thing.'

Evita's hats are similar in their outrageous excess to those that feature prominently - indeed become the *mise-en-scène* - in a scene in which Doña Leonor is competing with other women. This scene - which demonstrates how Doña Leonor's pretensions are to the upper class that comprised women who dressed for (but to out-class) each other - occurs in the priest's office. Doña Leonor wants Charlotte to play the piano at the town's charity show, but neither Padre Aurelio nor the other women are prepared for this 'shame.' Graciela Galán confirmed that the hand-made hats that the women wear here demonstrate their fantasies and competition with each other at play. Whilst their debate (in which in Figs. 7.23 to 7.26 every woman is having her say) ensues, the camera moves across each woman to the left, so foregrounding their hats,

¹⁶ Both photographs of Evita (Figs. 7.22 and 7.27) are copied from de Elia and Quiroz (1997, 82 and 128, respectively).

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Graciela Galán

Fig. 7.24:
Graciela Galán
wears Her
olders

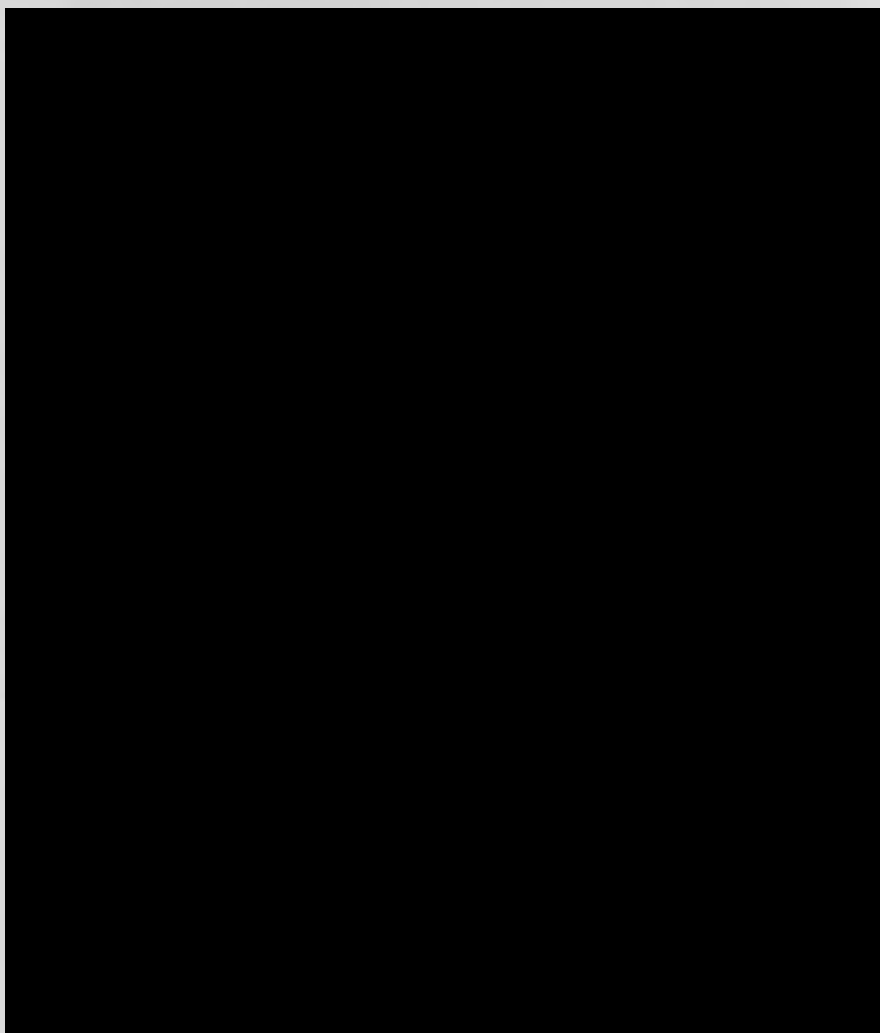
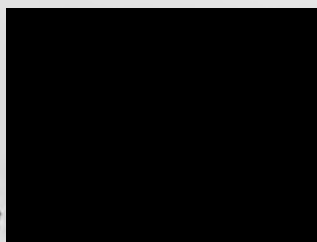


Fig. 7.22 Poor Girl from The Sticks: European Tour

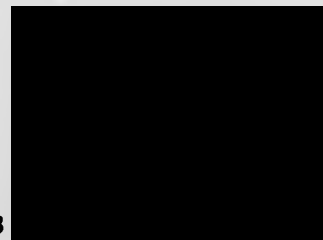
Fig.7.23**Fig.7.24****Fig.7.25****Fig.7.26**

until the shot eventually focuses the confrontation (Fig.7.26) between the deaf girl's mother and Doña Leonor. This then becomes a confrontation between Doña Leonor and the priest, in which the camera (by its close framing) makes 'issue' of her hat. He can shore up his institutional authority only by sitting behind his desk. We enjoy Brando's enjoyment at winning that her facial gestures, as in

Fig.7.27

demonstrate. By 'the way she wears her hat' Doña Leonor gets the better of the women and the priest (who - shot from

behind - reveals his baldness): **Fig.7.28**



Brando

has performed in her hat in a way in which we cannot see Evita do, and she has

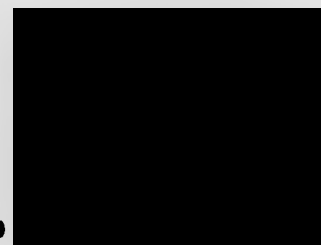
Fig. 7.29, Evita's Millinery Excess

won us over to laughing with, rather than at, her scheming. Thus Brando has positioned us in feminine identification with her (albeit an identification with her competition with other women), whilst the hats themselves have 'stood out' from the mise-en-scène.

2. Bemberg's Mise-en-Scène of Femininity: Integration or Display?

The scene of Doña Leonor's manipulation of the mayor demonstrates how in De eso no se habla, the sumptuousness of costume is foregrounded to the extent that it dominates rather than blends with the mise-en-scène.¹⁷ Chapter Three has discussed the feminist film theoretical position that costume foregrounds the feminisation of history. In making her costumes stand out, Bemberg is making this issue explicit. Furthermore, integration would not be consonant with Bemberg's challenge to the 'disappearing' of women. This challenge is made self-conscious (when later - at the wedding banquet itself - she is burying the dead mayor in a bath of ice) by the director's placing of the bulb beside (and

later above) Brando's blue dress, **Fig. 7.30**



which

then shines out from the dark.

¹⁷ Thus De eso no se habla is a very different kind of costume drama from some heritage ones that - for integrating costume within the mise-en-scène - Richard Dyer (2000, 43-48) applauds. As examples of those films that produce 'the utopian pleasure of a vision of integration even in homophobic societies of the past,' Dyer (2000, 48) cites Un hombre llamado 'Flor de Otoño'/A Man Called Autumn Flower (Pedro Oleo, Spain, 1977) Ernesto (Salvatore Samperi, Italy, 1978) and Maurice (James Ivory, United Kingdom, 1987).

As Perla in Miss Mary attempts to, Doña Leonor controls her spaces and the men (and women) within them through her sexual play and costumes. Tania Modelski's (1988, 77) arguments concerning Grace Kelly's Lisa in Hitchcock's Rear Window (USA, 1954) are pertinent. We have to 'consider all the ways (Lisa's parading of fashion) functions in the narrative,' rather than just see in it - as Mulvey's (1975) analysis would have it - her consumability by the male. The spectacle of women's dress does not so much fold into narrative as propel it in Bemberg's later films, as has been seen in the scenes where Doña Leonor uses her sexuality to manipulate the mayor.¹⁸ This refusal of integration goes against the grain of costuming in classical Hollywood cinema of the 1930s and 1940s. There costume - in expressing the assumption that its visual apprehension should not deflect from the (male Oedipal) narrative momentum - was to register on screen at the same time that it should recede (Gaines 1990, 182). Nevertheless, we may expect costume, rather than to cross against, to transgress with, its narrative in a feminist film. Bemberg's play with costume and feminine sexuality is used in the furtherance - not the hindrance - of a female narrative. The 'history' or narrative of all of Bemberg's films is propelled by the female protagonist's (sometimes defiant) statement of her (erotic) desires. As this desire is unruly (in that it refuses to be contained, either within the home or within closed narratives), so is Bemberg's delight in costume.

¹⁸ In cinema, a classic account of the activation of desire is the folding of spectacle into narrative. That Bemberg's spectacle of costume increasingly (across the trajectory of her films) defies such a proposition can be gauged by Brando's comparative merging within her mise-en-scène (of therapy group) that Chapter Two's analysis of Señora de Nadie has shown.

3. Feminist Glamour/Masquerade as a Strategy

Bemberg does, however, exceed feminist film theoretical expectations by making her women (increasingly) glamorous. Glamour - as an excess of femininity - is a problematic site for feminist discussion, as is its capture on the screen. Mary Ann Doane (in Penley 1988, 216) suggests that the 'simple gesture of directing a camera towards a woman has become equivalent to a terrorist act,' while Susan Linville (1998, 86) favourably compares von Trotta's 'appealingly unglamorous' heroines to those of her contemporary male New German directors whose heroines are flamboyant and thus 'fascinatingly fascist and "safe" for the classic male spectator.' How (in constructing such a glamorous femininity, by which she is indeed to be distinguished from von Trotta) is Bemberg not a 'terrorist'? The above analysis of Bemberg's use of Brando in *De eso no se habla* has pointed to many ways in which Bemberg contests received notions that glamour is in the fetishistic service of men. Firstly, if glamour makes women visible, Bemberg is making 'significant the insignificant' (Barthes 1978).¹⁹ Saulquín (1997, 197) distinguishes 'the three most notable characteristics of women's fashion in Argentina: elegance, uniformity and the seductiveness that comes from a tight-fitting dress,' arguing that they 'have their origin in woman's insecurity.' Secondly, if in Bemberg's women, this insecurity gives expression to a defiant excess of glamour, it also

¹⁹ That glamour was used by women not to disappear is made clear by another context, that of British women in the Second World War. Because this war broke down some of the traditional divisions between men and women, certain 'conventions of gender were maintained, for example the retention of glamour and pre-war fashion in the face of utility clothing or uniforms' (Gledhill and Swanson 1996, 3).

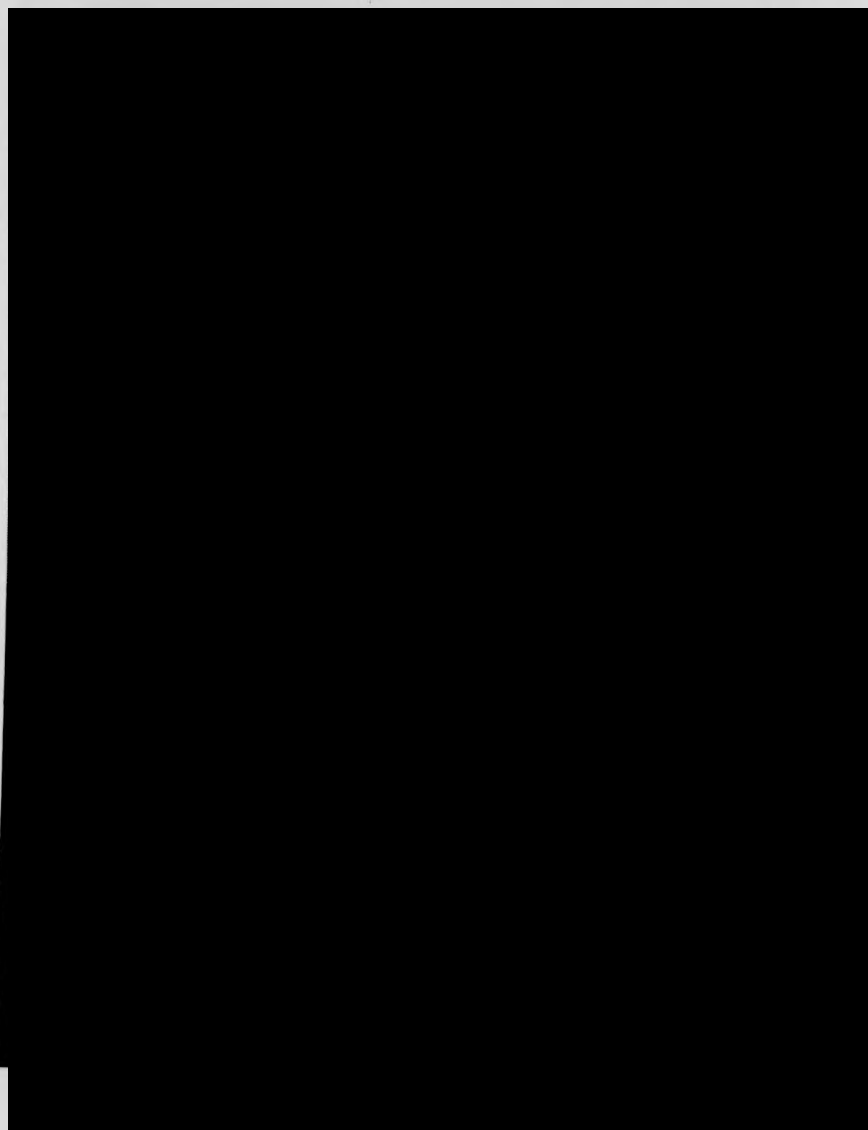


Fig. 7.31: Publiaty Still: Marlene Dietrich

addresses a paradox of feminist film criticism that, as B. Ruby Rich (1998, 87) complains, 'insists on our absence even in the face of our presence.'²⁰

Thirdly, we have seen that Doña Leonor uses glamour in an effort to empower herself. In this respect, Brando's glamour recalls the pre-second-wave feminism of such actresses as Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich.²¹ Doña Leonor mimics the femininity of such as Dietrich as Concha in *The Devil Is a Woman* (USA, Josef Von Sternberg, 1935) in that she obtains power through knowing (and enjoying) how others see her. Doña Leonor's confrontation with the mayor over the burial of the dwarves (analysed in Chapter Five) has been a parodic case in point. It is not only the glamour of her hat, but her sensual expression of ease and enjoyment that makes part of Doña Leonor's feminine power over the priest. In a publicity still (Fig.7.31) Dietrich similarly expresses ease, pleasure and control. Dietrich's bared shoulder is made more seductive by her action of leaning into the camera. That seduction is made knowing by her direct gaze confronting the viewer. Her confident hand on hip makes the statement that she enjoys the knowledge of her power. This knowing and empowering glamour involved a hyper-feminisation. Jacobowitz and Lippe (1992, 10) argue of Garbo's publicity stills her almost 'excessive femininity' which is demonstrated in her 'lamé coat, the open neckline, the fullness and waves in her hair.' Garbo's femininity (in Fig.7.32) is expressed through gesture (her head tilted backwards sensually, and her hands drawing attention to her chest by seeming to

²⁰ In full, Rich says, 'According to Mulvey, the woman is not visible in the audience which is perceived as male; according to Johnston, the woman is not visible on the screen ... How does one formulate an understanding of a structure that insists on our absence even in the face of our presence?'

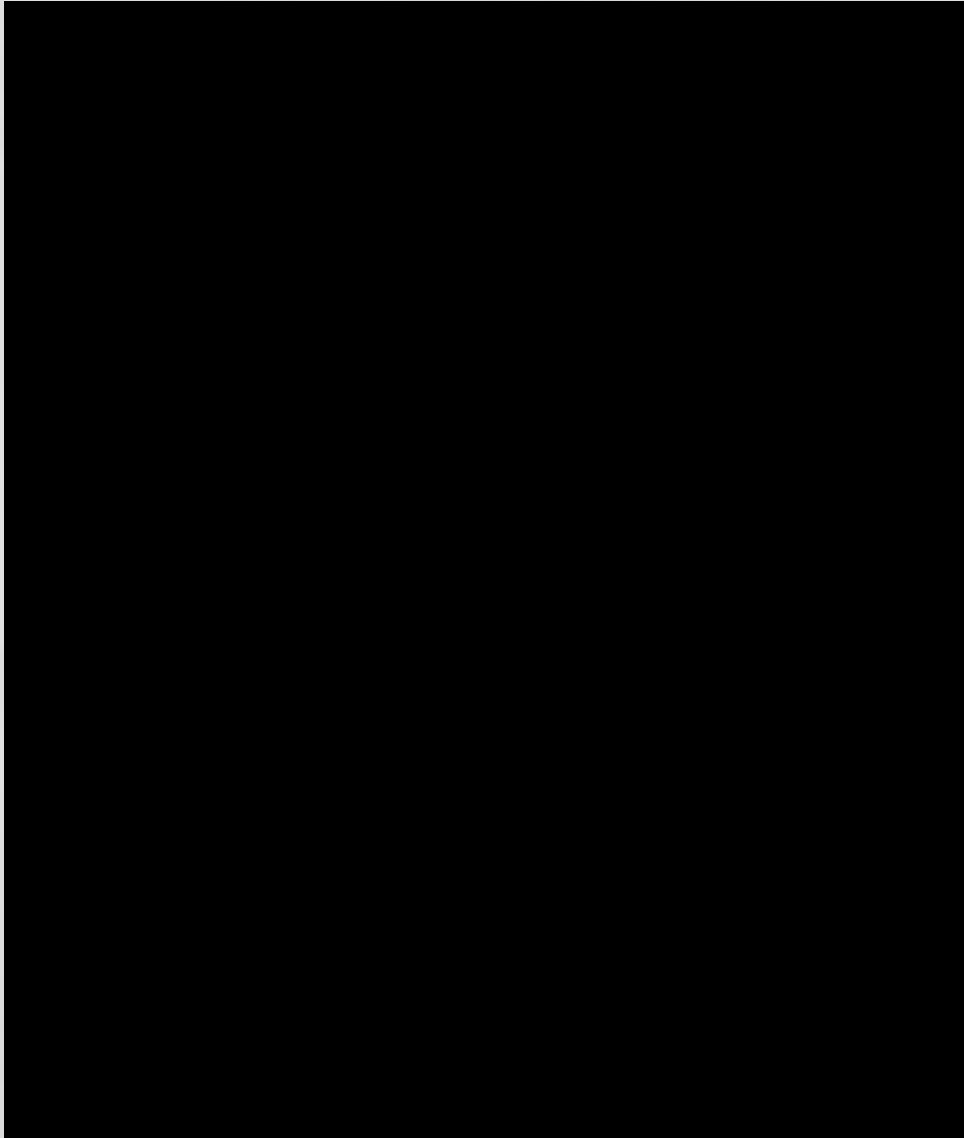


Fig. 7.32: Publicity Still: Greta Garbo

draw back its clothing) as much as it is through costuming.²² The knowing empowerment through the hyper-femininity has many ends: These women (like Doña Leonor) are using glamour towards social advancement, and to counter sexual containment. And in their knowingness they demonstrate their sense of their performance of femininity.²³

Fourthly, when that (feminine) visibility becomes excessive, in other words, when Bemberg has Brando exaggerate her character's femininity, it is done to the point of highlighting it as a construct: Her vocal presence, with its traces of masculinity (such as in the scene with the crippled mayor) contrasts with the excessive feminine code of her dress to suggest that that dress is part of a performance of femininity. Early on in the film there is a scene in which the performance of femininity is highlighted. Interestingly, it is a scene that intimates that when we are looking at Brando as Doña Leonor, we have been looking at the wrong woman. This is the scene in which Charlotte acts out the role of Carmen. Chapter Five saw that the scene begins with a mid-distance shot of Charlotte from the waist upwards smiling at herself in a three-way mirror. She is pleased with what she sees. There is brief silence before the soundtrack of Carmen hits in. The camera pulls back to reveal Charlotte in full-length, white nightdress, white pearls, red earrings, and a red and yellow flowered shawl. She twirls twice in the mirror. The camera now pulls back just far

²¹ Apart from the differences of genre and the period of filmmaking in which Garbo and Dietrich worked, the irony of the difference between them and Doña Leonor to which Bemberg points, is that the former were stars, whereas the latter can only fantasise about becoming one.

²² Both (unidentified) publicity stills of Dietrich and Garbo (Figs. 7.31 and 7.32) are copied from Jacobowitz and Lippe (1992, 11 and 10, respectively).

²³ Feminine self-presentation was also important to Bemberg in her personal life. All of Bemberg's collaborators said that she was feminine as well as feminist. If, as Patricia Maldonado added (Buenos Aires, 4 September 2000), she was 'muy coqueta/very coquettish,' Bemberg's own recourse to femininity was playful and provocative.

enough to accommodate at the 'wings' of the screen two bedside lamps upended on two chairs. These lamps spotlight her performance as glamorous woman, for which Charlotte has improvised a stage.

The next cut, however (to a close up of the gramophone), allows for a switch to an entirely new *mise-en-scène* although we are in the same room. As the camera moves left from the gramophone and from its background of pink-flowered wallpaper it moves over to a background of blue. The switch is marked as the camera moves over the dividing line where pink wallpaper stops and blue wallpaper begins. The camera comes to rest and frame Doña Leonor dressed in blue against the blue wall and blue doorframe. This time Doña Leonor is not rendered distinct from the *mise-en-scène*. This (for once) is Charlotte's scene as she makes clear when she re-sets the gramophone after her mother has abruptly interrupted it in her distress at what she has seen. Doña Leonor has seen a performance of glamour and femininity (similar to her own) that parades the sexuality of her daughter just as do that of Carmen and the femme fatale of classic film noir. Nevertheless (fifthly), Charlotte and Doña Leonor (in her dance, and in her shiny blue dress, respectively), draw attention to their bodies through movement, thereby countering any sense of their voyeuristic capture that usually occurs (in film noir).²⁴ We have seen the mayor's impotence inflect the spectator point of view when he is sick and Doña Leonor is at her most glamorous. The spectator/mayor is arrested by the woman's flamboyance of costume, and cannot (although s/he wants to) look (voyeuristically) beyond such

²⁴ By this movement within the spectacle, the woman resists objectification and enjoys her body, thus averting the spectator from a position of voyeurism to one of surrender. I take these ideas from Richard Dyer's (1978, 121) discussion of the embodiment of the femme fatale by Rita Hayworth as Gilda.

brashness. S/he is constructed as wanting to look at Brando's body because Brando's body and its movement are elements that the camera highlights (in, for the most part, long to medium shots) more so than her face. The energy of her body is expressed through exaggerated movement. Brando does not resist voyeurism. She defies it by inviting the camera to capture and to celebrate, her sexuality.

As a sixth strategy of glamour, Bemberg's femme fatale becomes a site of gender turbulence that (as we have seen in Doña Leonor and her blue dress) emasculates men. In *De eso no se habla* there are four men who play large roles: d'Andrea, the mayor, the priest and Mohamé. These men are correspondingly weakened as Brando increases in comic flamboyance across the film's narrative trajectory. (This is whilst they remain central as protagonists, and carry a greater narrative burden than the wider gallery of male characters in Llinás' original tale.) A clear (comic) example of this is seen in the line up of audience (of nervous priest and crippled mayor) at Charlotte's piano recital. They are behind Doña Leonor whose costume (of glorious red dress which Galán 'exaggerated' with huge shoulder pads, and whose great white collar performs a fan across her neck) is on full display and occludes, thereby further diminishing, them. The men frame and highlight Doña Leonor's hyper-femininity. We see her perform their emasculation in the puffing up of her shoulders,

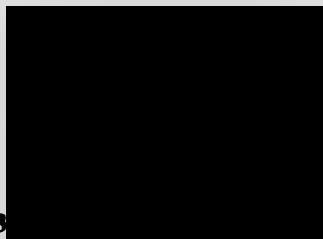


Fig.7.33 before the next cut begins her look

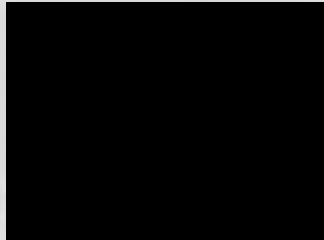
around to see how this effect has scored:



Fig. 7.34

The corporeal signs of the priest's

nervousness, of sweating forehead and grimace as well as her own pleasure



show how it has: **Fig. 7.35**

Both her pleasure and

his nervousness are echo of the scene in which, although he has attempted to castigate Doña Leonor for the burial of Widow Schmidt's dwarves, she gets the intellectual and sensual better of him. Chapter Five has shown how there (with the aid of her hat) Doña Leonor sexually embarrasses the priest, so that her costume has worked to counter an oppressive institutional masculinity, which otherwise is represented as weak indeed. Now, in this scene, identified with the mayor, the priest becomes one in a host of grotesque and risible men in this film. Such identification is underlined by his formal separation from the sympathetic Mohamé (who is backstage) and d'Andrea and the doctor (who are outside).

A (seventh) defiant way in which Bemberg is not being a terrorist (except to men), is by using Doña Leonor's pre-feminist glamour in a post-feminist strategy of masquerade. Chapter Three saw that for feminists, masquerade foregrounds the historical costume drama's questioning, not only of what truth is, but of how we gauge it. A woman is also masquerading when she mimics her

own femininity. In terms of its construction of femininity, feminists view masquerade in two opposing ways. The theories of masquerade - notably of Joan Riviere (1929) - that read it as defensive, rest on Freud's proposition that women's 'castration' make men fear that women want what they lack, and that they are thus 'castrating.' To compensate this fear the male fetishises the sign of the woman's lack, her femininity, and in so doing ascribes to that femininity the status of the phallus. Because she does not have the phallus, woman becomes the phallus. In order to avoid punishment by men whose masculine prerogatives, by being the phallus, they have usurped - women don a mask of excessive femininity. This understanding of masquerade arises from an 'always already' negative definition of feminine lack. Woman is further negatively defined (and confined) in that (as the phallus) she is to be had by the man. None of this makes happy reading.

Riviere's notion of the masquerade as defensive can be turned around, however. Luce Irigaray (1985 b, 68-85) argues that woman can empower herself by mimicking the role of femininity ascribed to her. Instead of working as a defensive mask, masquerade becomes an offensive strategy and sends up femininity as a male construction of women:

To play with mimesis is ... for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, *without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it*. It means to resubmit herself ... to 'ideas' ... about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but *so as to make 'visible', by an effect of playful repetition*, what was supposed to remain

invisible ... It also means 'to unveil' the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because *they are not simply resorbed* in this function (Irigaray 1985 b, 76). (All italics mine.)

The strategy Irigaray advocates is for woman to make her femininity irreducible to a (male-) imposed idea of it. This translates on the visible plane to refusal of resorption. The key and inter-involved strategies of 'taking on' or mimicking one's femininity are of standing out and playfulness. These two strategies are those that analysis has suggested of the excessive femininity of costuming in De eso no se habla. Doña Leonor's triumph in the scene of the hats (with the mayor, and the other women) shows her character putting both strategies of playfulness and standing out to work, and the two scenes (with the sick, and then the dead, mayor, respectively), have made Bemberg's play with the outstanding blue dress explicit too. Irigaray (1985 b, 78) continues:

Women should take on the way in which they have been 'defined as lack, deficient, or as imitation and negative image of the subject, they should signify that with respect to this logic a **disruptive excess** is possible on the feminine side. (My rendering in bold.)

This excess is not disruptive in its renunciation of the feminine 'style' but in the questions it asks of its appraisal. If masquerade reveals what is hidden, the question becomes one of reading. Of Brando's performance, the question becomes how she makes us see her masquerade as either offensive or defensive. Analysis has shown that we appraise Doña Leonor's dress (and body) via an

emasculated point of view, and that we appraise the women's hats comically. Both emasculated and comic modes of appraisal encourage us to read the actions and the dress of Doña Leonor as offensive.

Irigaray (1985 b, 79) also suggests that the appraisal involves more than the visual sense. She suggests that the feminine mimicry of feminine style should not only privilege sight, but make that sight 'tactile.' Chapter Four discussed Bemberg's multi-sensory aesthetic in *De eso no se habla*. This chapter's analysis has exemplified how we are made to feel the texture of Brando's blue dress. In making her dress tactile, Doña Leonor's dressmaking and Bemberg's filmmaking return us - as does Jane Gaines (1990, 23) - to the anthropological meaning of the word *fabrication*. This means to possess, to have, which 'having' is result of a tactile awakening. The excessiveness demonstrated in the scene of the women's hats for example, celebrates (and parodies) both tactile desires to feel and to have. The expression of such sensual and possessive desires is transgressive of the (patriarchal) silencing and containing of woman.²⁵

Finally, because masquerade acknowledges femininity as a mask, and because in flaunting it (the masquerading woman) holds her femininity at a distance, masquerade has positive implications for the (female) spectator: Through its use she can distance herself from the position of the too-close-an-identification with the woman on the screen that Mary Ann Doane (1987) pessimistically posits.²⁶ Bemberg's films refute Doane's position by providing the necessary distance in

²⁵ Carmen Vrljicak-Espain (1992, 10) - a critic of the representation of the female image in Argentina - cites Baudrillard's contention that the final aim of fashion 'consists in dramatizing an intimated desire for transgression.'

showcasing masquerading women. Furthermore, by making the screen characters themselves suggest a female fantasy of dressing up, De eso no se habla enacts Pam Cook's (1996, 44) suggestion that costume dramas allow the female spectator an active play with her assumed gender role and positioning (notwithstanding that de Lauretis (1991, 248) wittily criticizes such a proposition by asking how the female spectator can masquerade in the dark). We have seen how Doña Leonor is aware of putting on a role in the scene with the mayor and how the film shows this as a further theatrical construction by having her move to a non-diegetic (comic) music that dramatizes it. We are not masquerading in the dark but laughing out-loud at the protagonist's strategies of masquerade, and by identification engaging in Cook's more hopeful proposition.

4. Excess Wit: Kitsch or Camp?

If humour is part of Doña Leonor's offensive strategy of masquerade, Brando performs a particularly subversive comedy. We have seen that the masquerade in Brando goes beyond her loud costumes and extends to her comic gestures and mannish voice. It is not so much that glamour has empowered her as her sense of it (her performance of it and her playing up of her sexiness) has and thus is the offensive effect of masquerade redoubled. When she wheels the mayor to the toilet the physical performance of her glamorous femininity is excessive (thus made self-conscious) to the point of underlining itself as a performance. Brando's acting highlights Judith Butler's (1990 a and 1990 b) propositions that gender is performative and merely appears an authentic expression of biological sex only through its re-presentations. Traditionally, the representations of

²⁶ In 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator' (quoted by de Lauretis in *Bad Object Choices* 1991, 248).

biological sex have been closely bound up with patriarchal power. Brando's humour challenges patriarchal power by its laughter at her own performance of feminine sexuality. Furthermore, if it is true that 'like sexuality - indeed with sexuality - laughter (itself) has been closely bound up with power' (Gray 1994, 6), Bemberg's own appropriation of humour is a form of defiance.

Bemberg's humour is not, however, unproblematic. For the blue dress, Galán said that she looked for a 'ghastly' cheap and 'kitsch' material. Her models for Doña Leonor's sense of dress were 'Menemistas' (the women of President Menem who famously were kitsch, blonde, made-up and over-dressed).²⁷ The intention was for the audience to laugh at Brando's social pretension (in other words, to laugh at her class).²⁸ In this blue dress, however, Brando's performance outwits the intentions even of Bemberg and Galán. In it Brando as Doña Leonor comes closer to what in the 1960s in Argentina was a combination in fashion-conscious women of 'hyper-sexiness' and refinement (Vrljicak-Espain 1992, 103). Thus I argue that it is in the distinctions between kitsch and camp that we may come closer to understanding both the quality of Brando's display in De eso no se habla and the quality of spectator involvement with it. It is not so much what is and is not camp or kitsch, but how you look at (them) (Dyer 1976, 113). In terms of perception, they are sensibilities and in terms of how one is, they are performances. Whilst kitsch, as well as camp, has something to do with style and incongruity of style to content (both privileging the fake copy), there is an element of cruelty in the hyper-sentimentality of

²⁷ Carlos Saúl Menem was President of Argentina from 1989-1999.

²⁸ In contrast, Mastroianni - who, Galán confirmed (Buenos Aires, 2 September 2000), was to be dressed as an 'up-to-date, sophisticated, wealthy European,' and against whose dress that of

questions gender construction, camp's representations of artifice (in association with the gay culture) question the naturalisation of desire. Thus Brando's heightened gender display is not only camp in its theatricality, but subversive of sexual placement indeed.

Finally, her humour makes Bemberg an unusual feminist filmmaker for her time. Charlotte Brunsdon (1986, 4) says that (the few) 'humorous moments that there are (in feminist films) often directly address women as women, and particularly, as women who know - about men, about woman's lot, etc.' The point of the humour in the courtroom in A Question of Silence (Marlene Gorris, The Netherlands, 1982) is that the men cannot understand what the women are laughing at. This chapter has seen that in Bemberg's films, women are not only looking at, but laughing with, each other. Now it considers to what effect.

5. Woman-to-Woman Address

De eso no se habla puts on screen some of those debates that Chapter Six has explored in questioning the quality of the look both within and across Bemberg's screen.³⁴ If in the picnic scene of Miss Mary, Perla performs to others within the diegesis, in De eso no se habla, Doña Leonor's sense of

have seen and the stars they would like to be. In the latter novel, a provincial Don Juan is given the 'star treatment' by his many lovers: he and their affairs are wrapped in the glow of a romantic Hollywood movie. Bemberg's camp (like Puig's) involves a tender laughter in its celebration, as well as parody, of these women. Such laughter is bound up in the way in which Bemberg spectacularises her women, and in the way in which De eso no se habla presents Brando especially (but the other women also) as hopelessly fantasising. The scene of the hats has made this clear.

³⁴ Rachel Moseley's interviews with British women concerning their home dressmaking (modeled on film stars) in the 1950s and 1960s, reveal a gendered mode of looking that is neither passive nor resistant (to film star images), but is 'rather actively engaged in the production of self as image "to be looked at" ' and involves, like Bemberg's characters in De eso no se habla, the acquisition and display of respectability (Moseley 2001, 487). Moseley extends the debate from not just how and who looks in the cinema, but to what is at stake

performing to the camera is vivid: she flaunts herself to the spectator. Doña Leonor genders this look as female in three ways. Firstly, the male point of view is rendered weak. We have seen that when Doña Leonor takes the mayor to the toilet and sways so sensually down the corridor, the spectator's gaze has been emasculated. Secondly, this begs the question to whom (of which gender), and for whom was she performing? Thirdly, in that scene Doña Leonor positioned herself - knowingly - in front of the woman director's camera. All three of these strategies have a comic effect, which reinforces the complicity between the female spectator and female actress. This complicity demonstrates how, according to Gaylyn Studlar (1990, 248), costume is a way of acting on and controlling the gaze. Studlar argues that because Marlene Dietrich is in 'direct erotic rapport' with her spectator, she can be used to theorise the subversive relationship of the female spectator towards her. Studlar (1990, 248) further suggests that the female spectator 'identifies with and has a desire for the powerful femme fatale.' About this desire (which is not necessarily lesbian in Bemberg's films) we can again learn something from lesbian theoretical positions. One of these positions argues that both femme and heterosexual feminist mimicry can only signify excessive femininity by notion of a norm of femininity in the first place. (This comes close to those negative readings of masquerade that have been discussed above.) According to Sue Ellen Case (1989) there is, however, a clear distinction between the lesbian femme's femininity and the conservative femininity of the 'straight' woman. The lesbian femme cites the feminine subversively in that her sexuality is actively directed at another woman: the butch. If this is the case then two things follow. Firstly,

(respectability). Nevertheless, Bemberg's films have asked us to examine also the emotion with which that looking is fraught.

the lesbian femme speaks her femininity differently only through her sexuality. Secondly, dominant notions of masculinity and femininity can only be challenged through the presence of a woman (the butch) who mimics masculinity.

Whilst there are no 'butch' women in Bemberg's films, analyses have revealed that Perla and Doña Leonor delight in flaunting their sexuality to other women - not so much in competition with them for the attention of men, but for the attention of each other. Even when they are flirting with the women on the screen (only), they are therefore flirting with the spectator who is positioned (both by the female actresses' own point-of-view shots and by Bemberg's editing) as female. Thus within the diegesis we have seen heterosexual femme speaking to heterosexual femme, which address constructs the spectator accordingly. But Case's theory - notwithstanding that Bemberg circumnavigates (or exceeds) it - is useful in that it highlights the importance of questions of sexual address. It is largely through their dress that Bemberg has the women in her films perform their femininity to each other. Ruby Rich comments on Judith Mayne's argument that Dorothy Arzner's own dress as well as the costumes in which she dresses her actresses are indicators of lesbianism: 'I think this produced an interesting and coherent argument for fashion as sexual identity - you've given a whole new meaning to the term closet!'³⁴ We could say that Bemberg's women address each other as closet femme-to-femme. Nevertheless, women are prevented from looking at each other voyeuristically. In the scene of the burial of the mayor in a box of ice, the blue dress is used not just to heighten,

but as the heightened against the mise-en-scène (darkness), and this has been knowingly pointed out by the presence of the bulb spotlighting (the dress). We are so arrested by the dress' (tacky) glamour that we are obstructed from a voyeuristic look beyond it.

Conclusion

In De eso no se habla Luisina Brando is excessively hyper-feminine by the ways (through performance and gesture) in which she wears her idiosyncratic costumes. Whilst Chapter Six's analysis of Brando and her costuming in Miss Mary suggests that the discourse of sexuality her hyper-femininity there serves is an ambiguous heterosexuality that loves to flirt with other women, this chapter has seen that in De eso no se habla Brando is competing, as much as flirting, with women within the diegesis. Whilst women comically shown as dressing for and against each other may not be the most feminist statement, the result is nevertheless other women's comic pleasure. If Brando shows a knowing and enjoyed awareness of the other women watching her, she is thus making the spectator want to look at her. If our active pleasure of looking at Bemberg's screen images of beautiful women challenges Laura Mulvey's (1975) pessimism which has it that the spectator identifies with the male active look, the laughter of Bemberg's female spectator repositions her (from a possible masochistic identification with powerless screen women) to an alignment with sexually-defiant and powerful women. The result of Brando's competitive dressing is male impotence. The spectator's laughter involves her in complicity with Brando's obliteration of men. If sex will not be talked about in 1930s' small-

³⁴ Rich's comment was provoked in a round-table discussion of Judith Mayne's (1991) 'Lesbian Looks: Dorothy Arzner and Female Authorship' (recorded in *Bad Object Choices* 1991, 103-

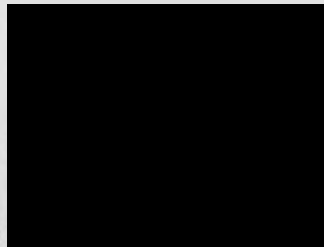
town Argentina, Doña Leonor 'talks' about sex in her sensual wearing of costume.³⁵ Doña Leonor's transgressions lie in using masquerade strategically, rather than defensively, to have what she wants. Bemberg's feminist 'glamour' delights in its oxymoronic qualities. Her transgressions lie in constructing an excessive feminine glamour through which she can both celebrate and analyse one woman's sensual enjoyment of herself as spectacle. Thus she also confirms the identification of her spectator with the 'feminine' at the same time that she makes questions of gender identity. We are looking at glamour which stands out - is made feminist and funny - by its filmic analysis as a strategy. Bemberg's women defrock their men and institutional masculine walls tumble. Spectator identification with Brando as Doña Leonor rather than is masochistic partakes of her defiant play with hyper-femininity.

Finally, Bemberg's hyper-femininity involves a subversive humour that in turn imbricates a sense of tragedy. Analysis has revealed that a key feature of Brando's acting is to counteract the comedy of her costume with a note of melancholy. The melancholy attends the sense that her hyper-femininity transgresses, but cannot break, the mould of patriarchy. In the same way, if Bemberg's construction of transgressive femininity lies in her re-orientation of the diegetic and non-diegetic female gaze, she invests that gaze with a tragicomic quality. The sadness lies in the spectator's desire for the expressed sexuality of her protagonists, which expression has been especially difficult for women in Argentina. Sadness is also part of an elegy for disappearance, and

144).

³⁵ The brothel scenes in *De eso no se habla* function (not just comically) to demonstrate the hypocrisy of codes of honour that allow men their sexual release whilst demanding a public, social respectability of them (and women) that disavows questions of sex and of sexual pleasure.

Bemberg's films start where they began: embattled against the too real forces of patriarchy in Argentina. Thus the sense of sadness that inflects Bemberg's comedy suggests a moral analysis of how things are as well as of how things should be. It is Charlotte's 'invisibility' that reminds women that Bemberg's films cannot of themselves reconstruct us and that emasculation of the male (like magical realism) might only be a wish fulfillment of Bemberg's and our own impotence. As a caution, Charlotte finally wrests the camera from Bemberg (as Bemberg did from men) and in place of her wedding dress - pointedly - dresses



herself: **Fig.7.36**

This is what at last we look at,

and are reminded in the ultimate ironic twist of Bemberg's direction that while all of us (apart from the narrator, Mohamé, who centres her here by his reach towards her) have been looking the other way, Charlotte has been a colourful exponent of other-than-sexual-self-realisation. Finally, and paradoxically, in her last two films Bemberg's women are not even interested in the sexual act. They use their sexuality and laugh at it but towards wider questions of fulfillment. Thus Bemberg's construction of an increasingly defiant and glorious femininity suggests - through its own wish fulfillment - a sense of thwarted opportunities and not just celebration. But that these constructions are transgressive is celebration indeed.

CONCLUSION

This study has aimed to assess Bemberg's contribution to feminist filmmaking. Analysis of her six feature films (the major primary source) has taken account of her intention to create a new look, in other words, a new femininity. The study has found Bemberg's feminist practice to be transgressive. Feminist film theory has underpinned the textual analysis. It has been the major secondary resource of my research. Analysis of other primary sources (principally unpublished documents in The Miguens Archive) has borne witness to a quirky humour that involves a 'politically incorrect' laughter at women. Interviews with many of Bemberg's collaborators in Buenos Aires corroborated another of my hunches: that purist, second-wave feminist as she was, Bemberg made an ideal of beautiful women, wishing to construct their femininity on the screen. Her authorial signature combines an aesthetic strategy of sumptuous display (involving much humour) with a thematic preoccupation with transgressive women. Hers is a humour that is nostalgic for, at the same time that it celebrates, beautiful women. Thus, whilst this thesis' major claim is that Bemberg did create and celebrate a new look at and of woman, it recognizes that the language in which she did this is tinged with sadness as much as with a subversive laughter. Whilst such textual practices flout those most often associated with feminist filmmaking, the study suggests how they nevertheless are feminist.

Chapter One saw Bemberg noting Bresson's advice: 'Try to show something that - without you - nobody would know' (Burton-Carvajal 1995, 40). What has

Bemberg taught us?' Bemberg has taught us that a delight in femininity is consonant with a pure feminism at the same time that she has taught us that feminist film criticism alone will not do. Bemberg's cinema has begged broader than just feminist applications of film textual and cultural analysis. These readings have helped to distinguish her feminist from her Latin American idiosyncracies. The more Bemberg's practices were found to be eclectic the greater the scope and the challenge of the wider viewing and the critical literature became. They have augmented my initial wariness of that colonization involved in any 'western' analysis of a Latin American filmmaker - even one so steeped in European culture as was Bemberg. Having sought to assess the number as well as nature of Bemberg's filmmaking transgressions, this study (as well as making its principal claim) suggests that Bemberg helped to redefine Argentine cinema as popular cinema.

The claim and suggestion are made by answering three major questions: 1) What did Bemberg contribute to Argentine cinema? 2) What happens to her female protagonists? 3) How do her protagonist and films look? Contexts answers the first, and begins to answer the second, questions. In answer to the first question, Chapter One has suggested (not that she herself redefined but) that Bemberg alerted the world to a new - popular - Latin American cinema. This was resisted in Argentina but not international critical circles. It was not just because she was successful with a popular cinema, but because she was an aristocrat and a woman that Bemberg was refused critical approbation in Argentina. Chapter Two began the answer to the second question by examining the autobiographical trajectory of her female protagonists. It suggests that in

first speaking autobiographically Bemberg shows kinship with her fellow female practitioners, and that Bemberg's protagonists have to gain sexual before intellectual freedom. In gaining each freedom her protagonists are transgressing against men. Firstly, men (as husbands or fathers) represent the Familial Patriarch. Secondly, as Chapter Three has posited, the female protagonists transgress the Patriarch by breaking through the boundaries imposed upon them by Church and State. Thirdly, Chapter Four has seen the protagonist free of men altogether. Feminism completes the answer to the second, and answers the third, questions. Chapter Five asked who (and what obstacles) Bemberg's female protagonists encounter, and suggests that they resist patriarchal institutions (as far as they can) through the statement of their love and through their solidarity with other women. In answer to the third question, Chapters Six and Seven have suggested that Bemberg was successful in constructing alternative optics. The new look at woman involves a fresh orientation of the spectator eye. Sometimes Bemberg does not defy but anticipates feminist film theory. Especially her texts ask us to re-evaluate pessimistic feminist theories of the female gaze (and voice), and their associated theories of constructions of female desire. By the late 1980s Bemberg had already answered (especially lesbian) feminist calls of the early 1990s for the construction of alternative possibilities of position and of desire for women.

Because her feminist practice is unconventional, theorising it is difficult. I looked for a model of feminist analysis that combined the practice of textual analysis with questions of history and biography. Bemberg's autobiographical films request an examination of her feminist authorship that is not essentialist in

approach. Judith Mayne's model of female authorship has allowed for an openness to all possibilities of female desire (including but not exclusively lesbian) that I propose may be inscribed in Bemberg's films. This proposal has come out of the study of Bemberg's female gaze. Bemberg's texts fracture the female gaze. In its increasing instability and dislocation is a disorientating address to, hence construction of, an ambiguously-, or female-, gendered audience. Thus the fracturing of the gaze is not only answering Bazin's call for a multiplicity of visual perspectives. It disorients the spectator in her evaluation of, and desire for, the woman on screen. Bemberg also uses sound to suggest competing female subjectivities. In this she is not only answering McCabe's call for an equality of filmic discourses. The competing voices work with the fractured gaze to disorientate and dispossess the spectator of what is nonetheless offered to her desire's consumption.

Bemberg's earlier films anticipate a woman-to-woman address. In them, however, this address does not seem to be inflected with any question of desire. It became clear that in her later films a desiring female gaze is directed at and constructs the look and display of a beautiful - heterosexual - woman. My conclusion here is that Bemberg exceeds lesbian calls in constructing a female desire for another woman's freely-expressed heterosexual desire. Thus the desire is problematic in many ways. Examination of the look of her films (their *mise-en scènes*) has borne this out by relating Bemberg's use of 'tableaux' to her display of beautiful female actresses (Julie Christie and Assumpta Serna) whose star images are problematically fitted to their roles. Analysis has suggested that

such fit is aligned with the problematic desire, and draws attention to the character's display as hyper-feminine.

Continuing the examination of a woman-to-woman address in Bemberg's later films, the study asked how and why the displayed woman is made hyper-feminine. To this end it asked against and in what her display consists. It examined Bemberg's generic inflections of what I call the fantastic costume drama, in the 'ultimate' of her films (*De eso no se habla*), and asked how in the construction of a mise-en-scène of femininity, Bemberg's women are costumed and to what extent these costumes stand out. It concludes that their costumes increasingly are made more sumptuous than their surroundings, and the actress' (notably Luisina Brando's) gestures made more extravagant and comic. In her comic (even camp) exaggerations of women's glamour Bemberg's direction of the costume drama can be distinguished from her fellow women and feminist filmmakers. The comic celebration of sumptuously-costumed women suggests that Bemberg's films construct a new 'look' and tone to feminist films. At the same time the glamour of Bemberg's women is made feminist by its analysis as an offensive strategy. Bemberg's protagonists are showcased against their mise-en-scènes for the emasculation of men and the sensual delight of other women. Thus the hyper-femininity of her protagonists can also be read as a feminist refusal to disappear. Bemberg's construction of femininity must be read as her policy of liberation from all fascisms, the defiance of disappearance having particular resonance in Argentina. It is the resonance of disappearance that inflects all of Bemberg's comedy with sadness.

If all analysis has been addressed to Bemberg's crafting of a new femininity through the female protagonist's 'look' (with its consequent construction of her spectator), and her story, it is nevertheless clear that Bemberg's camera loves men. Thus the examination of the representation of women is measured against that of men as lovers and as state institutions. In men's weakness as lovers is represented their vulnerability. Whilst such representations throw into relief those of women as inherently strong but institutionally crushed, Bemberg shows her heroines resisting through the articulations of their desires, and where they do not, is implicit criticism. In her early films these articulations are expressed through a hesitant articulation of the gaze between women. These women's stories end ambiguously and ambivalently. Miss Mary is a case in point. Her ambivalences are tied up in women's self-censorships, and are expressed structurally through flashback and circularity. As the protagonist's narrative trajectory gets more daring (and her transgressions more dangerous) they speak a larger language. She breaks beyond the barriers of a local, Argentine, to move within a wider, mythical, 'history.' That readings in theories of magical realism and of carnival throw strange but revelatory light on Bemberg's final film demonstrates its 'universality'.

Men's weakness as lovers makes more menacing their institutional strength. Against such institutional strength (this project also asked) how does Bemberg make her 'real' characters resist? Bemberg's feminist treatment of historical women in Camila and Yo, la peor de todas has been examined. Camila and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz were crushed - to death. Camila assumes agency by becoming the seducer. Sor Juana resists in an almost purely intellectual way.

(In Yo, la peor de todas it is arguable that Bemberg renders Sor Juana too angelic, hence vulnerable.) Bemberg does not confuse her mission here with even a trace of (what might be charged of her other films) voyeuristic pleasure in the female. In both Camila and Yo, la peor de todas the seductions of costume are deflected onto other characters. This thesis suggests that Bemberg crosses her historical costume dramas with the melodrama in order to reinforce their project of mourning shameful history. Bemberg makes her protagonists' new stories speak recent Argentine history. Her histories accuse as well as mourn. Bemberg accuses the Catholic Church that not only hounded Camila and Sor Juana to their deaths, but that sanctioned the Argentine military dictatorship of 1976-1983.

Having accused men (this thesis suggests that) in De eso no se habla (her final film) Bemberg forgives them. Doña Leonor suppresses talk of the 'other' by burying garden dwarves with a pickaxe. This speaks of Argentina's recent 'Dirty War' when thousands of men and women were disappeared by the military. Nevertheless, these events are spoken in a 'magical-realist' mode that begs allusive readings and hope. Whilst Bemberg's preceding films have made men institutionally responsible, their forgiveness is now aided by appeal to Mastroianni's star persona of vulnerability. That vulnerability, however, carries still its connotations of responsibility. It is a responsibility that Mastroianni as d'Andrea redeems by love. His appearances are coded - through which he sees and falls in love with Charlotte - as 'magical.' Love (as interpreted by this film) is perception. Thus Charlotte must set herself free and wrest from the camera her own way of seeing - presented (in the film's final images) as revelation.

Charlotte's visions of an unfolding horizon across the Argentine pampas are also one of hope for the new Argentina. Through her final protagonist, Bemberg finally looks forward. Bemberg has exorcised her own and Argentina's history.

In summary, in creating a new look at and of woman, Bemberg's practices transgress four-fold. Firstly, she creates transgressive heroines. For her the primary transgression must be of sexism because that is 'the first expression of fascism' (Jaffe and Robin, 338). Accordingly, secondly, Bemberg's constructions of transgressive femininity address all fascisms. They transgress Argentine censorships (military, religious and social) of creative women. Her films are always (if sometimes oblique) commentary on the historical and political contexts within which they are made. Thirdly, Bemberg's practices transgress more than just social Argentine codes. Against a background of hostility in a male-, and leftist-, dominated film practice in Argentina, Bemberg's work marked a break in the definition of Latin American Cinema as abstruse and 'party-'political. Camila alerted the world to a new popular Latin American Cinema. Fourthly, Bemberg's textual practices - in displaying, yet alienating us from, her female stars - transgress the proscriptions of feminist film practice and theory.

Bemberg's fourfold transgressiveness is extra-ordinary in two ways. Firstly, she transgresses feminist filmmaking practice by showcasing, perhaps voyeuristically, lovely women. Secondly, she transgresses popular filmmaking by succeeding in it simultaneous to the construction of a female audience whose desires are rendered ambiguous. It is the first construction (made in the

vocabulary of popular cinema) that challenges the dominant conception of Argentine and Latin American cinema. As a successful popular woman and feminist filmmaker in Argentina, Bemberg is unique. It is the second construction that defies any feminist criticism of the first one. Whilst the larger claims of this thesis have been substantiated, the more minute proposals concerning lesbian desire are offered as ways of reading Bemberg's films. They are not definitive.

At the time of this thesis' presentation, there remains little textual exegesis of Bemberg's feminist constructions. The true nature of her feminist defiances remains unacknowledged. I hope to have contributed to a more accurate understanding both of Bemberg's protagonist and of a challenging and important artist of pleasure.

(79,865 words)

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A Transgressive Femininity:
Narrative, Spectacle and Desire in the
Films of María Luisa Bemberg

by

Denise Emily Miller

(Two Volumes)

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Film
Studies**

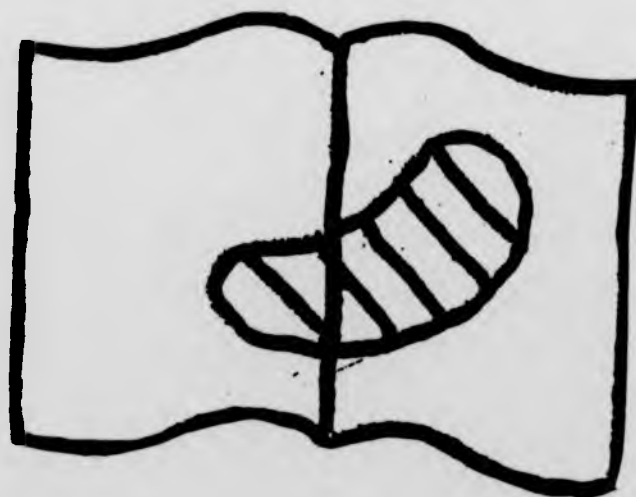
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August 2003

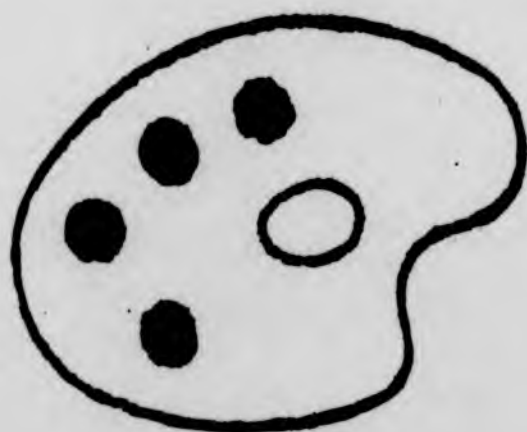
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APPENDIX ONE

María Luisa Bemberg: Curriculum Vitae

A. FILMOGRAPHY

COLLABORATIONS

- 1970 Crónica de una señora/A Woman's Story, by Raúl de la Torre (script)
 1974 Triángulo de cuatro/Four-Sided Triangle, by Fernando Ayala (script)

SHORTS

- 1972 El mundo de la mujer/The World of a Woman (director), 17 minutes
 1978 Juguetes/Playthings (director), 12 minutes

FEATURE FILMS

- 1981 Momentos/Moments, 97 minutes

Director: María Luisa Bemberg

Screenplay: María Luisa Bemberg with Marcello Pichón Riviere

Producer: Lita Stantic (GEA Cinematográfica, Buenos Aires)

Cinematographer: Miguel Rodríguez

Wardrobe: Margarita Jusid

Starring: Graciela Dufau, Miguel Ángel Solá, Héctor Bidonde

- 1982 Señora de Nadie/Nobody's Wife, 98 minutes

Director: María Luisa Bemberg

Screenplay: María Luisa Bemberg

Producer: Lita Stantic (GEA Cinematográfica, Buenos Aires)

Cinematographer: Miguel Rodríguez

Wardrobe: Margarita Jusid

Starring: Luisina Brando, Julio Chávez, Rodolfo Ranni

- 1984 Camila, 108 minutes

Director: María Luisa Bemberg

Screenplay: María Luisa Bemberg, Beda Docampo Feijoo, and Juan Bautista Stagnaro

Producer: Lita Stantic (GEA Cinematográfica, Buenos Aires, and Impala, Madrid)

Cinematographer: Fernando Arribas

Wardrobe: Graciela Galán

Starring: Susu Pecoraro, Imanol Arias, Héctor Alterio, Elena Tasisto

- 1986 Miss Mary, 100 minutes

Director: María Luisa Bemberg

Screenplay: Jorge Goldenberg

Producer: Lita Stantic (GEA Cinematográfica, Buenos Aires)

Cinematographer: Miguel Rodríguez

Wardrobe: Graciela Galán

Starring: Julie Christie, Nacha Guevara, Luisina Brando, Eduardo Pavlovsky, Gerardo Romano

1990 **Yo, la peor de todas/ I. The Worst Woman of All.** 105 minutes

Director: María Luisa Bemberg

Screenplay: María Luisa Bemberg and Antonio Larreta (based on the biography, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o Las trampas de la fe/Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz or The Traps of Faith, by Octavio Paz, 1982)

Producer: Lita Stantic (GEA Cinematográfica, Buenos Aires)

Cinematographer: Félix Monti

Wardrobe: Graciela Galán

Starring: Assumpta Serna, Dominique Sanda, Héctor Alterio, Alberto Segado, Franklin Caicedo

1993 **De eso no se habla/We Don't Want To Talk About It.** 103 minutes

Director: María Luisa Bemberg

Screenplay: María Luisa Bemberg and Jorge Goldenberg (based on the novella, De eso no se habla, by Julio Llinás, 1993)

Producer: Oscar Kramer and Roberto Cicutto, (Mojamé S.A., Buenos Aires, and Aura Films, Italy)

Cinematography: Félix Monti

Wardrobe: Graciela Galán

Starring: Marcello Mastroianni, Luisina Brando, Alejandra Podesta

In progress at the time of her death in May 1995, Un extraño verano/One Strange Summer

Screenplay: María Luisa Bemberg (based on the short story, El impostor/The Impostor, by Silvina Ocampo, 1948)

B. PRIZES

1970

Crónica de una señora

- ❖ Best Actress, San Sebastián Film Festival

1974

Triángulo de cuatro

- ❖ "Argentores" Prize for Best Screenplay awarded by the Argentine Society of Writers

El mundo de la mujer

- ❖ Selected for exhibition at the Women's Film Festival, Aosta, Italy

1978

Juguete

- ❖ Selected for exhibition at the Women's Film Festival, Aosta, Italy

1981

Momentos

- ❖ Best Actress, Huelva Film Festival
- ❖ Best Screenplay, Festival of International Film, Chicago

- ❖ Second Prize for Best Actress, Festival of International Film, Chicago
- ❖ First Prize of the Cinema Club of Colpuertos
- ❖ Best Film, Festival of International Film, Cartagena, Colombia

1982

Señora de Nadie

- ❖ Best Screenplay awarded by the Argentine Society of Writers
- ❖ Best Female Actor, Film Festival of Taormina
- ❖ Best Female Actor, Film Festival of Panamá
- ❖ Best Male Actor, Film Festival of Taormina
- ❖ Best Male Actor, Film Festival of Panamá

1984

Camila

- ❖ Diploma of Merit for Film Directing awarded by The Konex Foundation, Argentina

1985

Camila

- ❖ Nominated for Best Foreign Film by The Film Academy (USA)
- ❖ Best Actress in the Festivals Karlovy, Vary (Checkoslovakia)
- ❖ Best Actress, 7th Film Festival, Havana

1986

Miss Mary

- ❖ "Coral" Prize for Best Film, Best Actress and Best Cinematography, 8th Film Festival, Havana
- ❖ Best Film, 43rd Film Festival, Venice (jointly with Acta General by Miguel Litín, Chile, 1986).

1990

Yo, la peor de todas

- ❖ O.C.T.C. Prize at the 47th Festival of Havana
- ❖ Best production at the Chicago Film Festival
- ❖ Special Jury Prize, 12th Film Festival, Havana
- ❖ Prize of the Association of Screenwriters of Andalucía, Iberoamerican Film Festival of Huelva
- ❖ "Elvira Notari" Prize awarded beyond the competition because Bemberg on jury of Italian feminists, 47th Film Festival, Venice

1991

Yo, la peor de todas

- ❖ Best Film, International Film Festival, Cartagena, Columbia
- ❖ Diploma of Merit for Film Directing awarded by The Konex Foundation, Argentina

APPENDIX TWO

The Sheila Whitaker Archive

A review of findings in an archive collected from The Miguens (Bemberg)

Archive by Sheila Whitaker. There are eight full A4 envelopes, labeled after the films and miscellanea:

1. María Luisa Bemberg
2. Momentos
3. Señora de Nadie
4. Camila
5. Camila
6. Yo, la peor de todas
7. De eso no se habla
8. Notas de agradecimientos, notas sobre festivales, 'De eso no se habla,' 'Miss Mary,' 'Donación,' 'Camila,' 'Yo, la peor de todas'

The envelopes comprise press releases, newspaper and magazine articles, and some of Bemberg's business correspondence. The newspapers are predominantly Argentine (although some are North American and Italian). Because this is a selection from The Miguens Archive, the reviews do not present a comprehensive picture to the response to Bemberg's films. As they are all photocopies of the originals, many of them (unfortunately) cannot be fully referenced. In Appendix Five are pasted samples from this archive, and Chapter One's discussions are largely based on my findings in this and The Miguens Archive. I note that in Fragments of a Life and Career History (1991) Julianne Burton-Carvajal has collated Bemberg's own statements in her interviews. Below are a few more of Bemberg's statements and a few more impressions:

Many critics respond to the sense of the early films' solitude and alienation. What comes out clearly is that Momentos is a love story of solitude. Bemberg herself wanted an androgynous pair to indicate solitude: 'I wanted to use the couple as an image of solitude. I wanted them to represent that solitude of all humanity that they are desperately trying to relieve' (in an un-referenced article). With Señora de Nadie the interviewers' interest in existential themes of solitude etc. continues: 'I was interested in relating the story of a friendship between a man and a woman, a story of solitude, of solitude shared, of a relationship authentically democratic' (in Vosotras, Buenos Aires, 7 January 1982). Bemberg's early statements suggest (as in Clarín, Buenos Aires, 26 October 1980) that all love is disinterested, except that between a man and a woman, 'which is egotistical and predatory.' Bemberg is damning on the subject of heterosexual love: 'Love can be toxic for women because they become so enthralled that they forget about other parts of themselves ... it becomes a tool of oppression.' In most reviews of, and interviews concerning, Señora de Nadie, much is made of Bemberg's creation of a homosexual role.

By far the majority of reviews and interviews relate to the release of Camila and to its subsequent Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film. Bemberg is frequently asked why she chose a historical project. There are many articles in which priests are invited to speak. Yo, la peor de todas gets much less attention, interestingly. Interviewers recognize the allegory in De eso no se habla. One critic of De eso no se habla, Jorge Garayoa (un-referenced article), compares Bemberg's 'fusion of daily life with fantastic adventure' to the novels of Adolfo Bioy Cásares and to the latter's exploration of existential conflicts. There is

some (but not much) discussion of Bemberg's craft. In these discussions, Bemberg makes many references to Robert Bresson. She quotes him in one interview: 'Each shot should make a point - make them laugh or make them cry, but make them CARE' (La Razón, Buenos Aires, 17 May 1993).

When discussing her first film Bemberg touches on self-censorship when she says that women should be brave (in Vosotras, Buenos Aires, 8 July 1982). In Mendoza (30 May 1981) she says, 'Life is generous to those who are brave. Passivity is the monster that every woman has to kill in herself.' In the cases of both Camila and De eso no se habla, interviews focus on questions of censorship, and self-censorship in Argentina. Generally, in her interviews and letters there is a strong flavour of Bemberg's devotion to her country, and a strong sense of her indignation at any injustice. Such injustice she has to deal with in the questions of the interviewers themselves. Thus, even by the time of releasing Yo, la peor de todas she has to justify why she chooses women as her protagonists. She explains that because there are so few women directors, 'I want women to recognize themselves in my protagonists and to enrich themselves through their stories' (in La Gaceta, Tucumán, 15 May 1988).

On the whole and perhaps unsurprisingly, reviews feature stories of human interest. There are many reports of Julie Christie's arrival in Buenos Aires, which obviously was a minor sensation. Bemberg talks of her choice of actresses (talking of actors, not stars). She discusses her election of Luisina Brando for Señora de Nadie who 'is perfect for the role ... She has a mix of tenderness and disaffection' (in an un-referenced article). She chose Julie

Christie because she 'is an excellent actress. She has a great temperament and is extremely beautiful, with a Victorian air' (in Revista La Semana, Buenos Aires, 1986). For the role of Sor Juana, Bemberg thought of Ofelia Medina, and also of Jessica Lange or Jane Fonda, 'But that would have been a betrayal; Juana should be personified as she was, by a Mexican' (in La Nación, Buenos Aires, 1 November 1992). Ironically, she eventually chose the Catalan Assumpta Serna (much to the dismay of many Mexicans) because - as Chapter Six has seen - 'beauty is moving' (in La Nueva Provincia, Bahía Blanca, 10 September 1990).

APPENDIX THREE

The Miguens Archive

Here are listed my findings - further to those in The Sheila Whitaker Archive above. The Miguens (Bemberg) Archive is the original archive from which Sheila Whitaker made her selection. This archive is the property of Bemberg's daughter Cristina Miguens. Patricia Maldonado, Bemberg's personal secretary, is its keeper. Apart from the press releases, newspaper and magazine articles, and some of Bemberg's business correspondence, the archive houses Bemberg's unpublished writings. These I review (where I cannot quote them) in Chapter One. Bemberg's film reels are still kept in a basement storeroom of her Buenos Aires flat.

As Chapter One has seen Bemberg made no shooting scripts, just guiones/directing guides, and plans of action for shooting. I have a copy for the shooting of De eso no se habla. It is verbal (not visual): Bemberg (having as she did, an extremely strong visual sense) kept clear inside her head the look of each shot. (Lita Stantic and Félix Monti corroborated this in interview.) Chapter One has listed Bemberg's unpublished writings. I also found her travel journal, Notes on Mexico. (Bemberg and Graciela Galán went to Mexico for six weeks in 1989, prior to filming Yo, la peor de todas.) Bemberg's Notes are a collection of quotations/sketches. Clearly she felt that her 'biopic' of Sor Juana should be 'poetic' in the sense that poetry captures the ineffable. Included are the following statements (some in English, some of which are quotations, some of which are odd, disconnected phrases):

- ❖ There are some aspects of human life that can only be faithfully represented through poetry.
- ❖ Through poetic connections feeling is heightened and the spectator is made more active.
- ❖ 'Modern art has taken a wrong turn in abandoning the search for memory.'
- ❖ 'The explanation is that the pattern of life is far more poetic than it is sometimes represented by the determined advocates of naturalism.'
- ❖ I wanted to make the film as if dealing with a contemporary.
- ❖ Haydn's Farewell Symphony
- ❖ El interior de su cabeza (The inside of her head)
- ❖ El sueño del ángel (The angel's dream)
- ❖ Mundo físico (Physical world)
- ❖ Una interminable escalera (An endless stairway)

APPENDIX FOUR

Fieldwork in Argentina. Interviews and Institutions

My findings are presented and discussed in Chapter One.
Buenos Aires. August/September 2000:

A) Interviews**Academics**

- ♦ Raúl Horacio Campodónico, lecturer in film. Universidad de Buenos Aires. 8 September
- ♦ Paola di Cori, cultural historian. University of Urbino. 30 August
- ♦ Luis Facelli, film librarian. Manuel Antón Universidad del Cine. 8 September
- ♦ Clara Fontana, feminist associate of, and author of sole Argentine book on, Burnham. 4 September

Archivists

- ♦ Patricia Maldonado, personal secretary. 29 August and 4 September

Collaborators

- ♦ Graciela Galán, wardrobe (Camila, Miss Mary, Yo, la peor de todas and De eso no se habla). 2 September
- ♦ 'Meme,' Mercedes García Guevara, 3rd assistant director to De eso no se habla, daughter-in-law, film director (Río Escondido, Argentina, 1999), 31 August
- ♦ Jorge Goldenberg, co-scriptwriter (Miss Mary and De eso no se habla). 28 August
- ♦ Félix Monti, 'Chango,' cinematographer. 25 August
- ♦ Lita Stantic, producer, film director (Un muro de silencio, Argentina, 1994), 24 August and 30 August

B) Institutions

- ♦ Archive, Cinemateca. Museo de Arte Moderno, Río de Janeiro, 21 August
- ♦ Cinemateca. Buenos Aires, 5 September
- ♦ Universidad de Buenos Aires. 5 September
- ♦ INCAA (Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales), Lima 319, Buenos Aires, 8 September
- ♦ Escuela Nacional de Cine. Biblioteca, 8 September

(An analysis of reviews collected at the archive of the Cinemateca in Río de Janeiro, is by definition selective. The reviews - pertaining to Camila's release in Brazil (two years after its release in Argentina) - are unanimous in their praise. Folha de São Paulo (3 November 1988) tells us that 'For the last two years everyone here has wanted to see Camila.' Globo (Río de Janeiro, 7 November 1986) similarly heralds the film's popularity in Brazil by reporting, with a colour picture, the news of thousands of Argentines weeping after the film's release in 1984. After its release in Brazil, symptomatic comments are: 'A ticket to see Camila guarantees you many tears.' The only criticism comes from an expected quarter. This is from priests - not in review but in interview - objecting to the film's anti-Church stance and content.)

APPENDIX FIVE

Sample Documents

Momentos

Fig.A5.1 Giselle Cásares in Convicción (Buenos Aires, 20 May 1981)

Fig.A5.2 Daniel López in Convicción (Buenos Aires, 8 May 1981)

Señora de Nadie

Fig.A5.3 Publicity Poster

Fig.A5.4 César Magrini in El Cronista Comercial (Buenos Aires, 2 April 1982)

Fig.A5.5 Albert Down (with Bemberg's annotation: HIJO DE PUTA) in La Nueva Provincia (Bahía Blanca, 2 May 1982)

Camila

Fig.A5.6 Domestic Publicity Poster after the Oscar Nomination for Best Foreign Film

Fig.A5.7 Carmen J. Rivarola in La Prensa (Buenos Aires, 18 May 1984)

Fig.A5.8 Teresa Alfieri in La Prensa (Buenos Aires, 24 June 1984) (2 pages)

Miss Mary

Fig.A5.9 Daniel López in La Razón (Buenos Aires, 1 August 1986)

Fig.A5.10 Jorge Abel Martín in Tiempo Argentino (Buenos Aires, 2 August 1986)

Fig.A5.11 Alberto Tabbia in Variety International Film Guide 1987

Yo, la peor de todas

Fig.A5.12 Nan Giménez in Ámbito Financiero (Buenos Aires, 10 August 1990)

Fig.A5.13 Letter from Alberto Lattuada, Member of the 47th Venice Film Festival Jury, July 1990

De eso no se habla

Fig.A5.14 Publicity Still of Mohamé and the Circus

Fig.A5.15 Publicity Still of Luisina Brando as Doña Leonor

Fig.A5.16 Peter Brunette in the New York Times (25 September 1994) (2 pages)

Fig.A5.17 Cimercurio de Santiago (12 October 1993)

Fig.A5.18 Alfredo Serra in Revista Somos (Buenos Aires, 31 May 1993)

Fig.A5.19 Extract from a Letter (with Bemberg's annotations) from Roberto Cicutto of Aura Film to Oscar Kramer, Producer (17 March 1993)

Miscellanea

Fig.A5.20 María Luisa Bemberg Answers a Questionnaire (un-referenced newspaper)

Fig.A5.21 Making Fun of Bemberg's Feminism (La Razón, Buenos Aires, 20 August 1982)

Fig.A5.22 Letter to Time (English) and to La Nación (Spanish) from María Luisa Bemberg (9 June 1994) (2 pages)

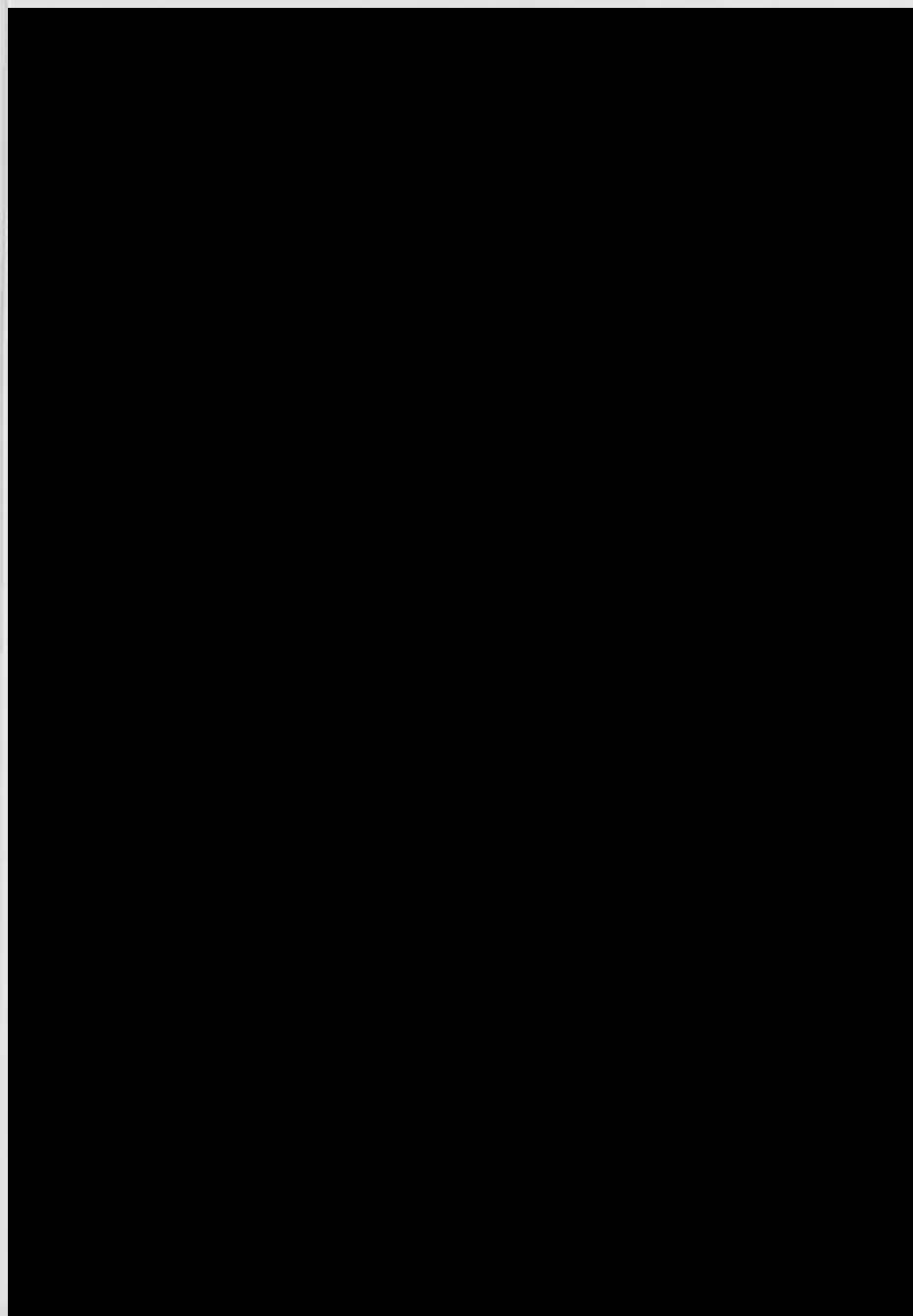


Fig. AS.1: Giselle Casares in Convicción

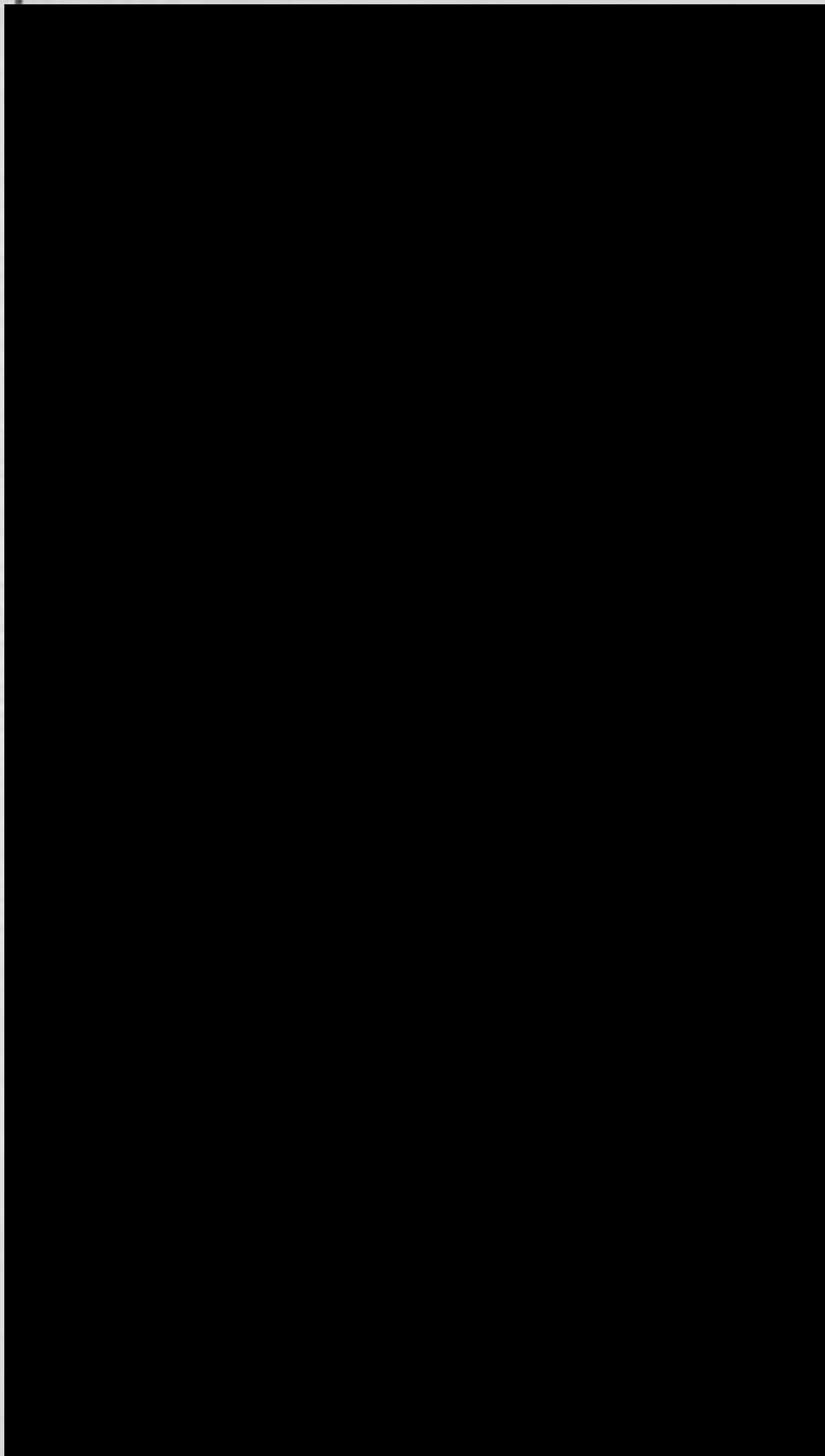


Fig. AS.2: Daniel López in Convicción

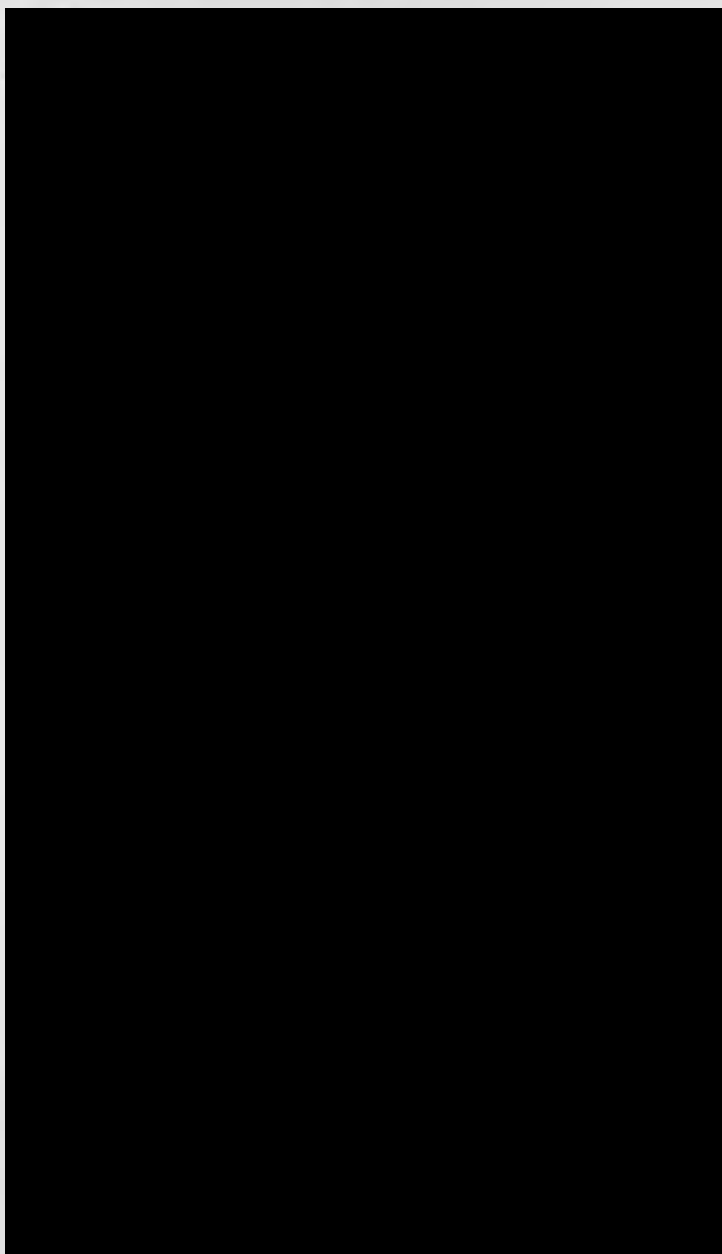


Fig.A5.3: Publiaty Poster For Señora de Nadie



Fig. A5.4: César Magrini in El Cronista Comercial



Fig A.S.5: Alberr Down in La Nueva Provincia

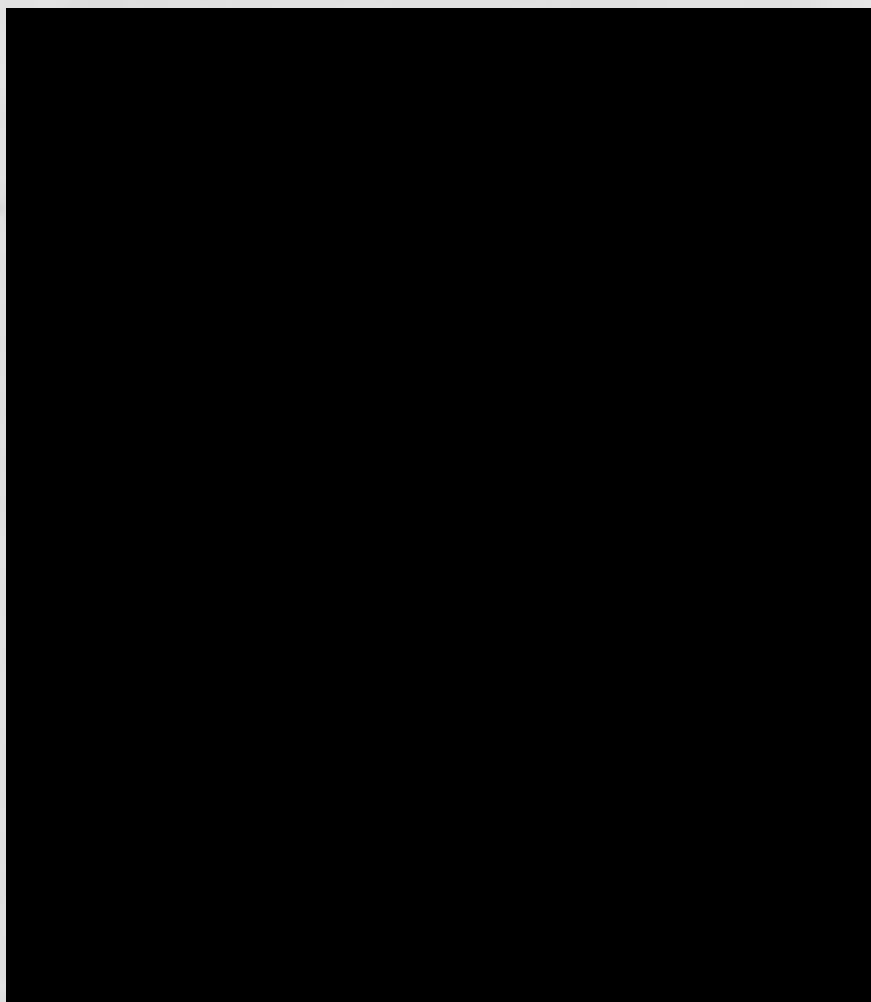


Fig. A5.6: Domestic Publicity Poster for Camila after
the Oscar Nomination for Best Foreign Film

18 MAY

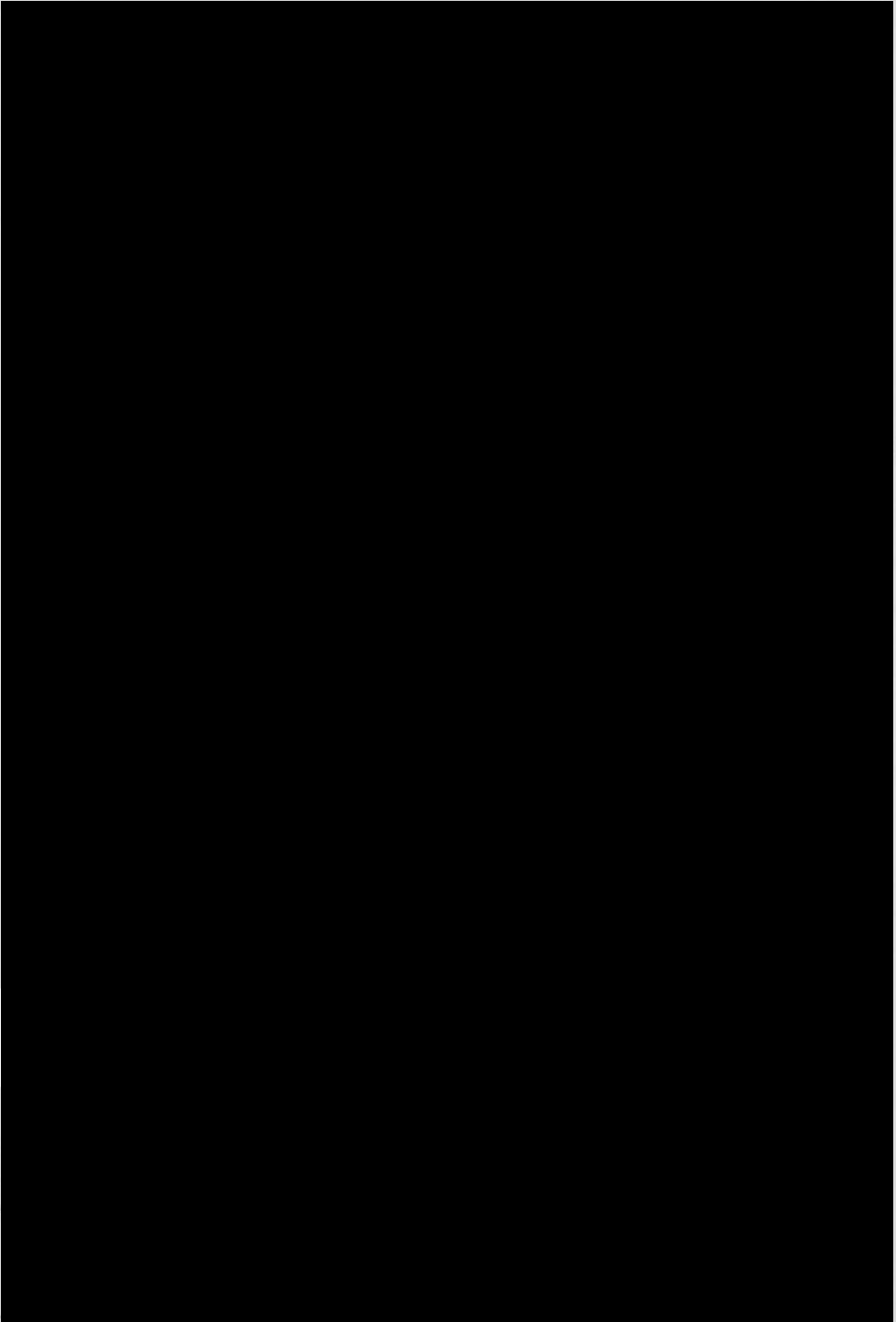


Fig.A.S.7: Carmen Rivarola in La Prensa

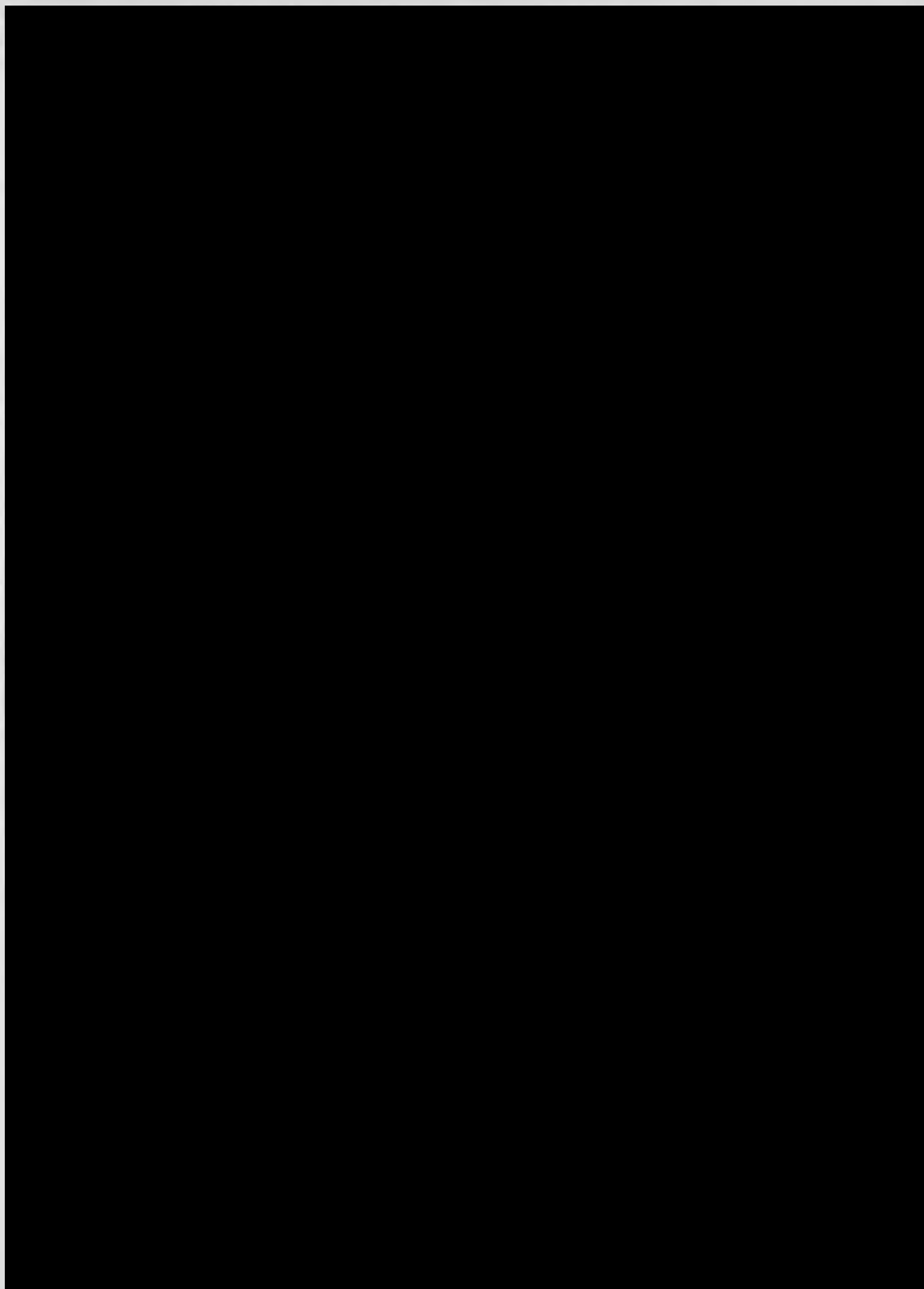


Fig. A5.8: Teresa Alfieri in la Prensa (2 pages)



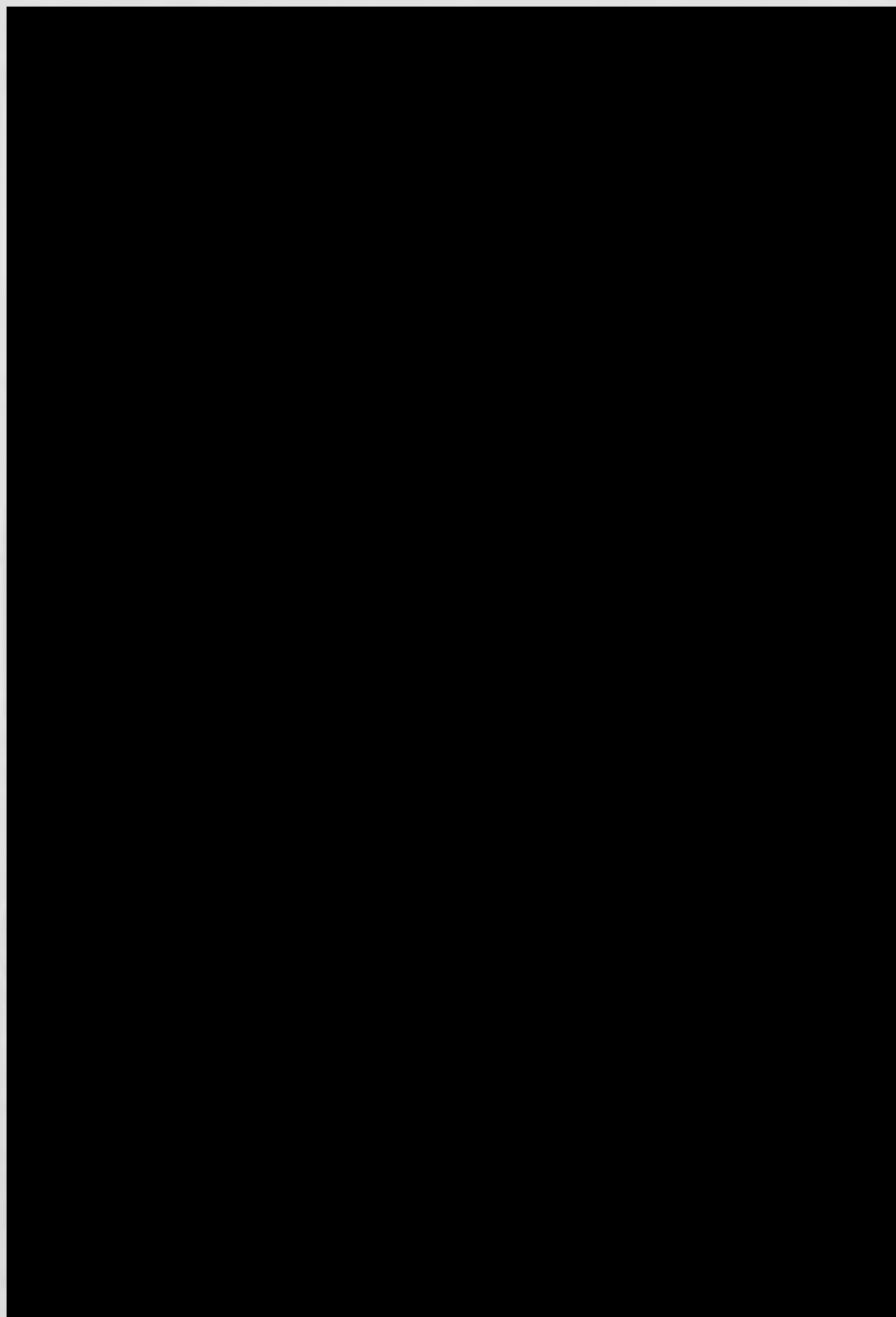


Fig. AS.9: Daniel López in la Razón



Fig. AS.10: Jorge Abel Martín in Tiempo Argentino

Fig. A.S. 11: Alberto Tabbia in Variety International Film Guide 1907

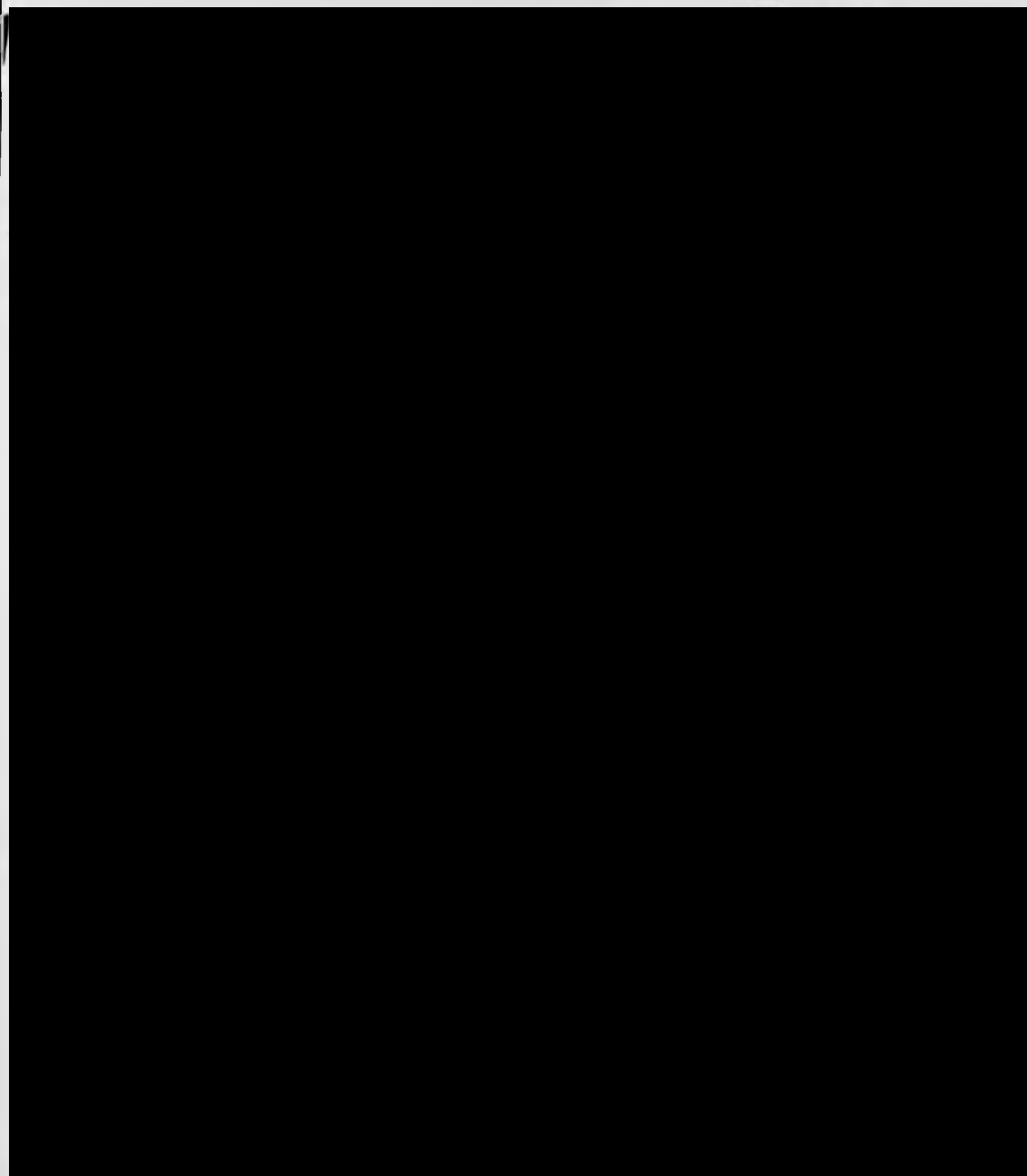
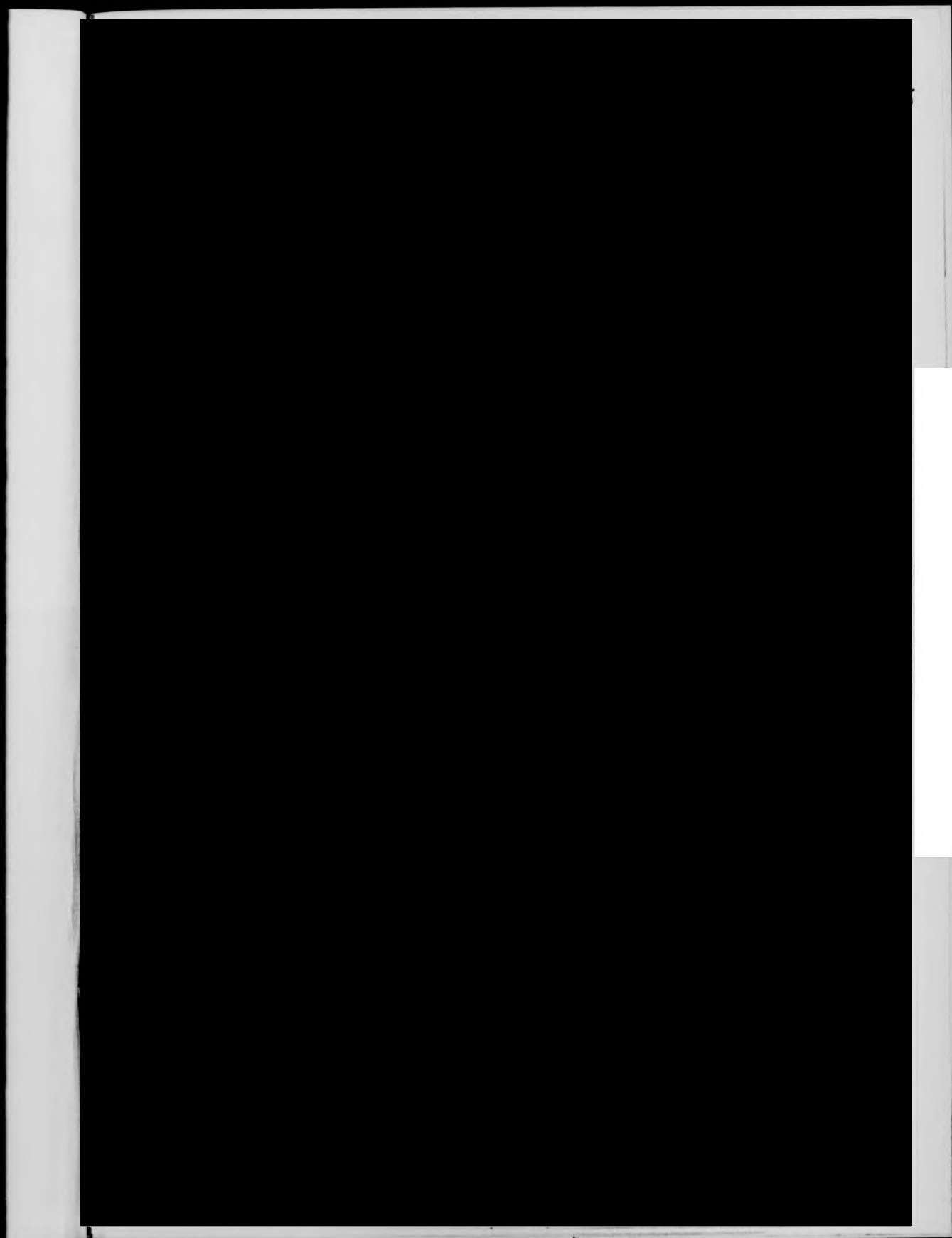
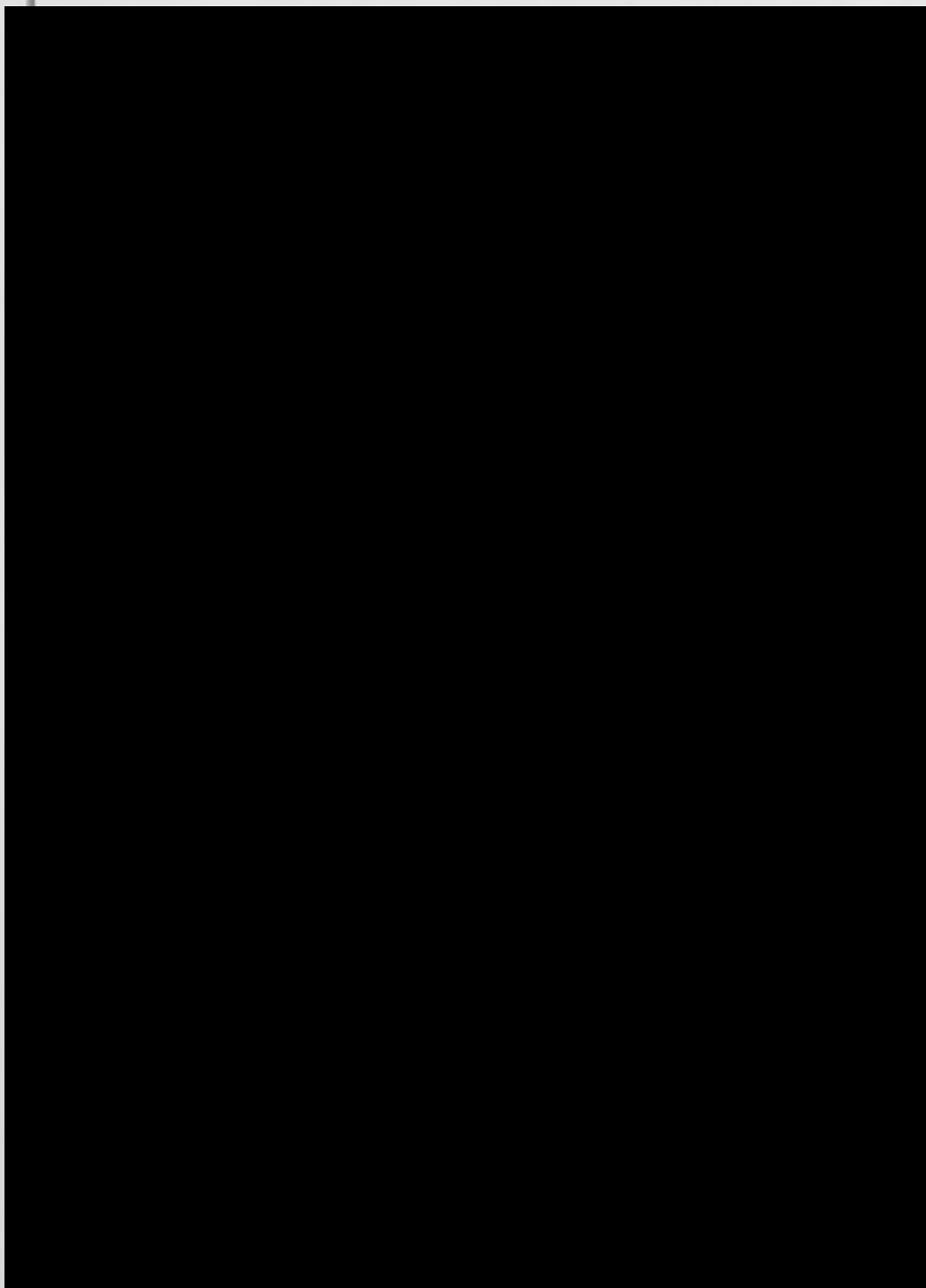
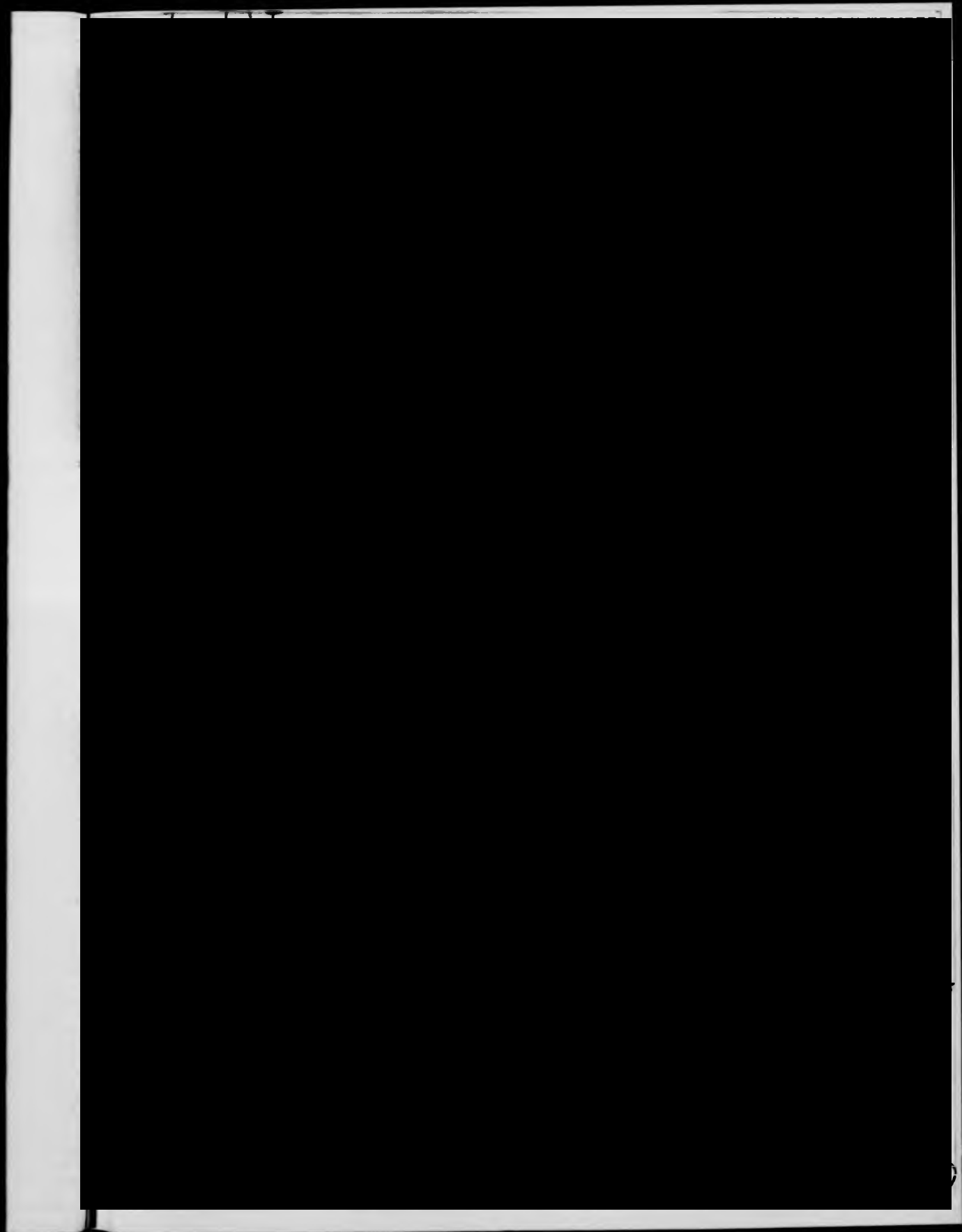


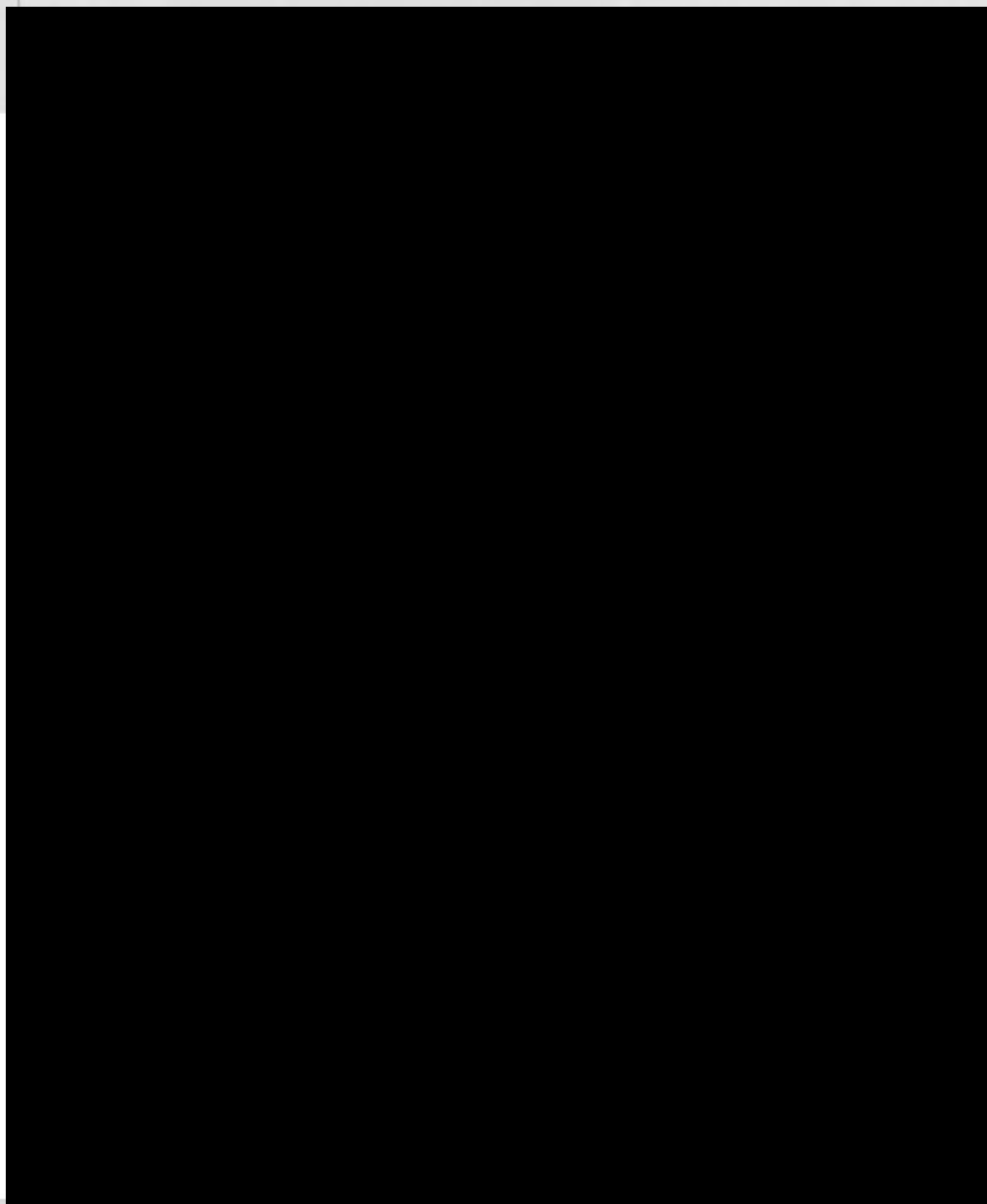
Fig. AS.12: Nan Giménez in Ámbito Financiero











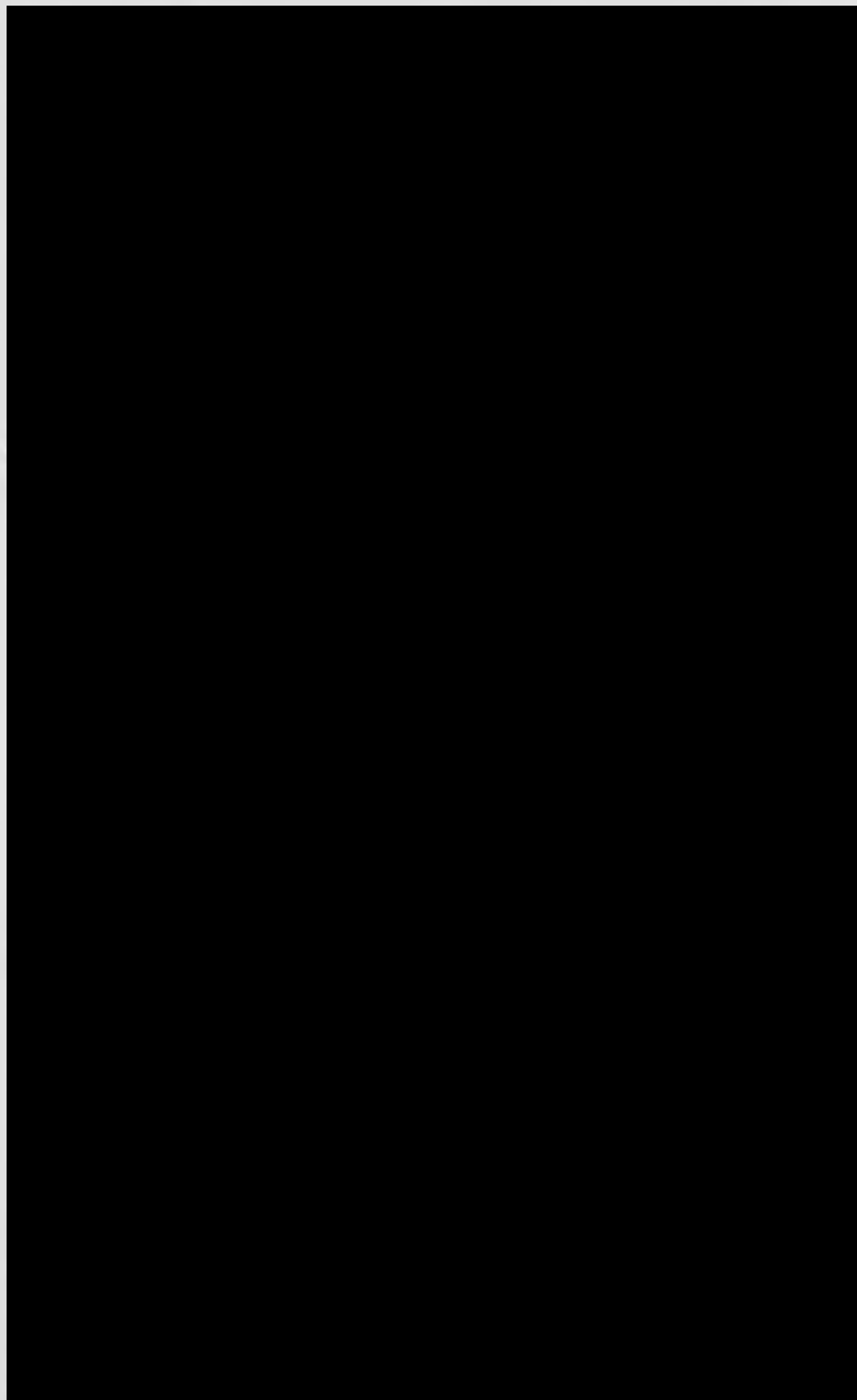


Fig. AS.17: Cimercurio de Santiago

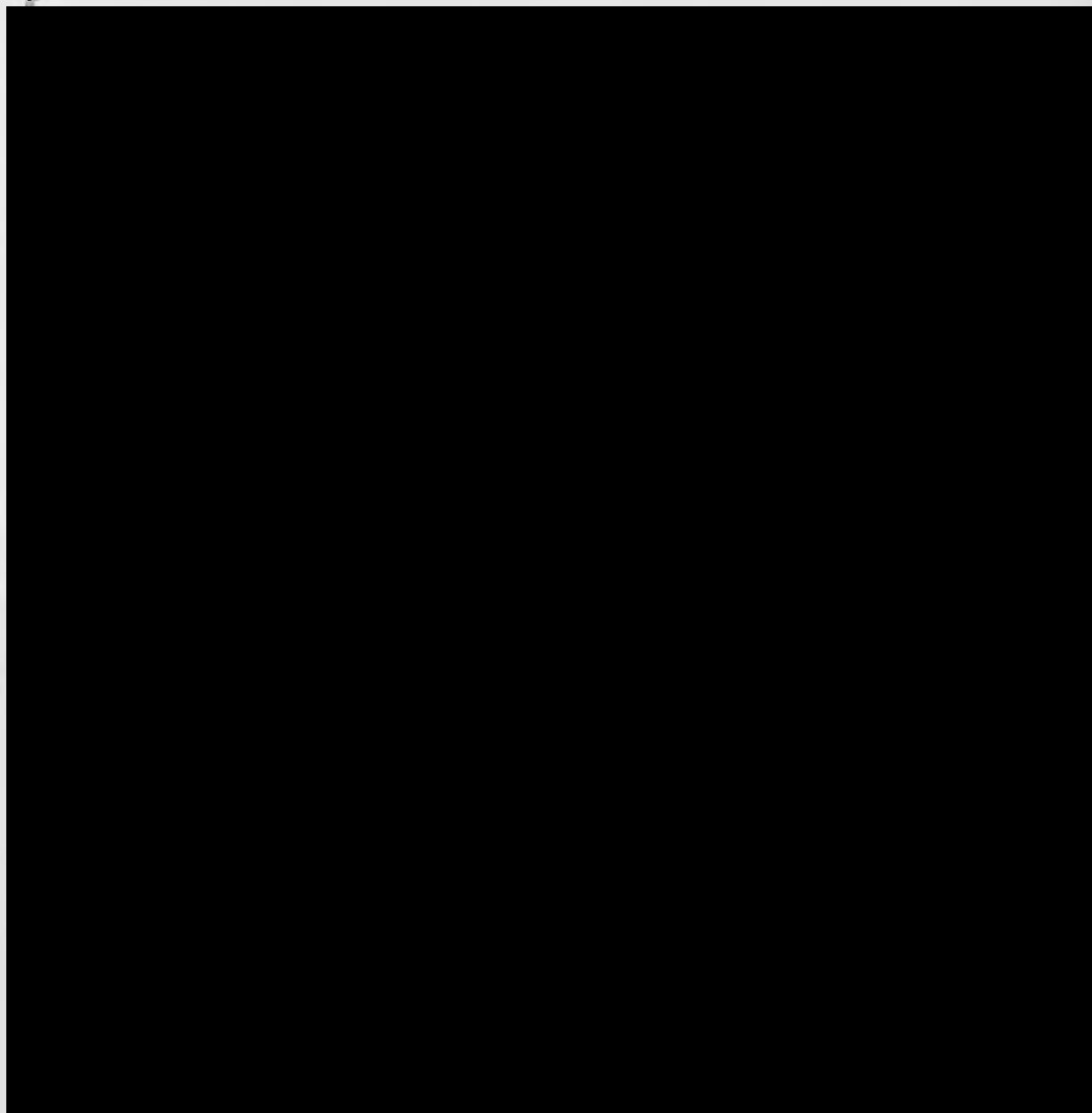


Fig. AS.19: Extract from letter from Roberto Cicotto to Oscar Kramer



Fig. AS.20: María Luisa Bemberg Answers a Questionnaire

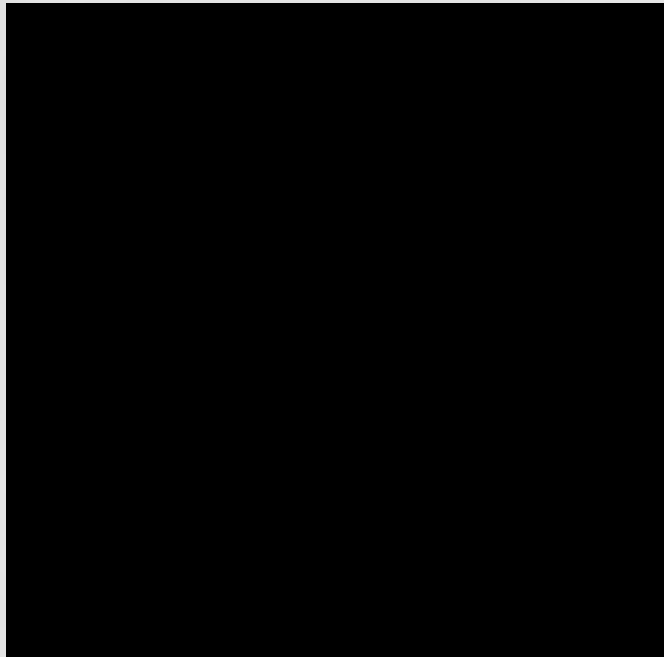


Fig. AS.21: Making Fun of Bemberg's Feminism

Maria Luisa Bemberg

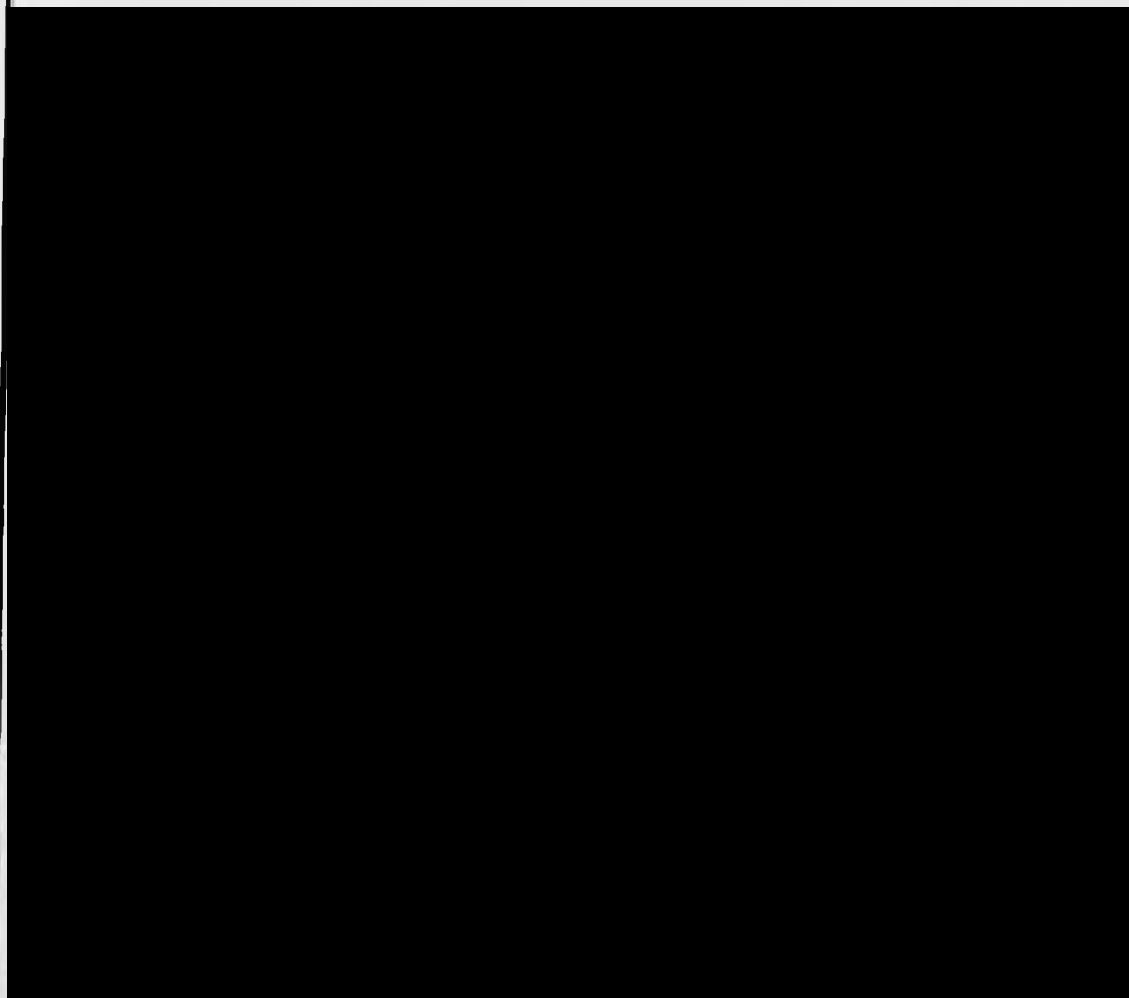


Fig. AS.22: Letter to Time and to La Nación from María Luisa Bemberg (2 pages)



APPENDIX SIX

María Luisa Bemberg and Margarethe von Trotta

Chapter One cites as Bemberg's favourite woman director, her contemporary and fellow feminist, Margarethe von Trotta (1942-). This thesis argues that Bemberg's humour make her special as a second-wave feminist director. Chapters Three, Five and Seven have drawn brief comparisons between her films and von Trotta's Die Bleierne Zeit, or Marianne and Juliane (West Germany, 1981). This brief case study of von Trotta's Schwestern, or The Balance of Happiness (West Germany, 1979), and some more comparisons with Marianne and Juliane, will further exemplify their kinship and differences, and in so doing point up Bemberg's humour.

Bemberg's and von Trotta's films share a similar structure. They favour the flashback to foreground a remembering female subjectivity. Flashback also indicates an autobiographical/psychoanalytical concern with raising the repressed. The sense of memory as a narrator aids in both directors the sense of open closure. In her discussion of Marianne and Juliane, Susan Linville (1998) suggests of von Trotta's ambiguity that (in refusing the spectator a secure status) it creates a viable political position. I suggest that working with both directors' ambiguities is always (for want of a better term) a spiritual dimension, towards whose evocation their formal compositions are strikingly similar, as Chapter One has suggested. Chapter Two has identified Bemberg's motifs (signifying questions of entrapment) of windows and grilles. As Juliane visits her sister in prison the camera tracks her for many seconds from behind the bars of the prison

yard. Whilst Juliane is on the other side of this prison, the implication of woman's entrapment in the free world of the male is made clear. Such signification is redoubled for the spectator in that the shot is first introduced out of context (we do not yet know that Juliane is on her way to a prison visit). All we see is a woman behind bars.

Parental and sororal relationships are themes that allow the films of Bemberg and von Trotta to explore questions of conflict between private and public political involvement. In Marianne and Juliane the relationship between two sisters (and their mother) subordinates any exploration of their heterosexual couplings. Likewise, Schwestern, a powerful psychological drama, concerns itself with the relationship between two sisters, Ana (Gudrun Gabriel), and Maria (Jutta Lampe). They are so close that they partake of one another's identity. The younger sister, Maria, is supported in her studies by Ana - but thereby controlled by her. Maria regains control of her own life (and that of her sister) by committing suicide. The bereaved sister replaces her with a younger friend. The pattern begins to repeat itself, until the younger girl breaks free. Both older and younger women are in heterosexual relationships (subordinated to their concerns with each other and within the plot). The fourth protagonist (in a minor role) is the sisters' mother (Doris Schade). The film ends with Ana trying to adjust to her loss of the second woman by attempting to become both herself and her sister. The narrative is structured through a series of flashbacks which themselves are often structured by Maria's voice-over intoning a childhood fairy tale. Schwestern opens with the idea of the woman's written word, so privileges the theme of women's intellectual work. The film shares a

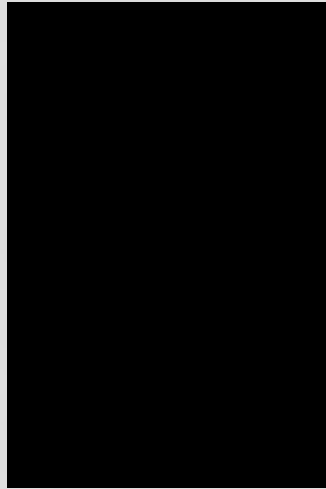
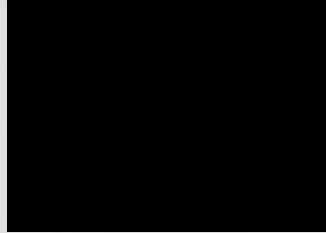
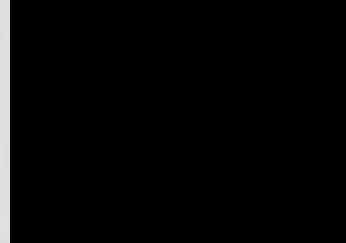
striking similarity in look to those of Bemberg. The opening close-up shot of a dreaming girl (not unlike Carolina in Miss Mary) immediately suggests this. The predominance of silences and a slow-moving camera reinforce this initial impression, as does (later) the use of always melancholic and often classical music. This film uses Dido's aria, 'Remember me, but not my fate,' in Purcell's Dido and Aeneas (1689) to symbolic effect.

The look of Marianne and Juliane (apart from a generally darker palette and the interjection of documentary footage of Nazi prison camps) is likewise similar to that of Bemberg's films. The narrative follows the reminiscences of Juliane (Jutta Lampe). She is telling her memories of her sister, Marianne (Barbara Sukowa) - imprisoned with the leaders of the Bader Meinhof - to her nephew. These memories return her to their arguments over the respective nature of their political involvements. They are children of an authoritarian protestant minister (Franz Rudnick). They are also of the generation that is faced with the responsibility of confronting the Nazi past. Both girls are horrified by (assuming responsibility for) it. Juliane chooses to fight from within, and chooses the personal as political by working for a feminist magazine. From beyond the margins of legitimacy, Marianne chooses the path of direct political action. There becomes a question, however, over Marianne's suicide in prison, which question Juliane pursues at the expense of her relationship with Wolfgang, her liberal partner. Finally she is the one to accept the responsibility of nurturing Marianne's orphaned child. As with Schwestern, Juliane's intellectual project is signaled at the beginning of the film with a camera ranging across her desk and

over her bookshelves. This project turns out to be her debt of truth to her nephew. She owes him her version of her sister's political life.

Chapter Three suggested that the melodramatic scene where the young sisters are arrested on their way to bed by their father's painting of the crucifix exemplified some affinities with Camila (released three years later than Marianne and Juliane) in equating State terrorisms with the terrorism of Patriarchy. Another scene, where the family are together at the dinner table, continues the theme of patriarchy (prefiguring Camila's dinner-table scene which shows Camila's first outspoken rebellion against her father). In von Trotta's film the father intones grace whilst the children's meals are left untouched. The drama of this scene lies in the adolescent Juliane's rebellion over her clothes: She will wear black jeans to the dance, she says. Eventually the mother (like Camila's) recognises her husband for what he is. She calls him 'The Egoist.'

Bemberg's and von Trotta's women express ambiguous sexuality. There is a striking difference here, however, between the two directors, which exemplifies in what Bemberg's feminist filmmaking is unique: von Trotta depicts sex discreetly (when at all), while Bemberg explores it. Furthermore, her women laugh, display themselves and flirt (often with each other) while von Trotta's women express seriousness over the matter. That Bemberg's films celebrate visual pleasure as a norm is made clear by the fact that there is only a rare instance of it in Schwester whose heaviness is rarely alleviated. This is where in one flashback the sisters as children, playing with their multiplied reflections,

Fig.A6.1**Fig.A6.2****Fig.A6.3****Fig.A6.4**

provide beautiful images that feature not only a familiar motif of mirror, but laughter and a bright palette similar to that of Bemberg's later films. Where von Trotta's films are usually somber, however, the sad tone of Bemberg's films (excepting the first, Momentos) is always inflected with laughter. Such laughter is bound up in the way in which Bemberg spectacularises her women. This is an issue, not just for feminist filmmaking, but for their theorists. That Bemberg refutes that feminist filmmaking should not spectacularise its female protagonists is examined in Chapters Six and Seven. It puts her in the canon of popular (as well as of feminist) filmmakers.

APPENDIX SEVEN

The Representation in Film of the Post-Dictatorship Argentine Man.

Chapter Four suggests that the duel that Ludovico d'Andrea instigates is a sign that - through his vulnerability to love - he is appropriating the narrative momentum of Bemberg's last film, De eso no se habla. This duel - ridiculous and funny - is also Bemberg's critique of machismo. In it Bemberg counters mainstream representations of vulnerable males who, according to Steve Neale (1993), are elevated, tragic figures. Neale suggests that on those rare occasions when men (in Hollywood films) are passive, their weakness is represented as part of their strength. This is not only true of men in Hollywood films. Of another national context Julianne Pidduck (2000) discusses 'the age-old thematic of the suffering male hero' in French culture evoked in Jean-Paul Rappeneau's Cyrano de Bergerac (France, 1990). The question not only becomes whether in Bemberg's films, men's weakness is ennobled and viewed with a sense of tragedy rather than derided. The question must also be asked how this might be culturally specific. There are political other than feminist reasons why men in Argentine films of the 1980s and 1990s might be filmed as 'weak.' Ginette Vincendeau (1995 b) suggests that the troubled state of traditional French masculinity (evidenced in French films of the late 1980s and early 1990s like Cyrano) might be linked to a crisis in patriarchal authority attendant on the eclipse of the tradition of populist leaders after de Gaulle. A further project for research could ask how Bemberg's representation of vulnerable men is in any way different to that of other Argentine directors responding to the aftermath of dictatorship.

Only a large sample of contemporary Argentine films would answer how Bemberg's feminist representation of the male contests both that of Argentina as well as that of Hollywood. Nevertheless, two Argentine films' representations of 'redundant' masculinity (directed by a woman and a man respectively) suggest examples whereby the specificity of the Argentine representation of the sensitive male could be measured. These films are La amiga/The Girlfriend (1989) by Jeanine Meerapfel and Un lugar en el mundo/A Place in the World (1992) by Adolfo Aristarain. They both star Federico Luppi whose expressive performance style (one in which the modulations of facial gesture speak louder than a physical presence) suits his role in both films of sensitive man coping with the aftermath of dictatorship.

The Girlfriend foregrounds women (in their project to remember the disappeared). Luppi is an out-of-work electrician, Pancho, whose role, as provider to his family, is therefore redundant. In the first sequence in which Luppi appears, is a sense of his dislocation in that we hear but do not see him. 'What a pig' he says to his wife (Liv Ullman) who, framed in close-up, gives us her point of view of the next shot of him: sidelined in the left side of the frame, 'grumbling like an old man.' This begins the scene in which the police raid their house, looking for their older son Carlos. Sometimes the man and wife feature in two shots, stunned at this intrusion. Although the mother is as powerless in the face of police brutality as the father, the barest shake of her head contrasts with his smaller movements to make him appear more helpless. He remains in the background, a silent, passive witness, whilst his wife looks in on the police

in her younger son's bedroom. One slight movement of hers occludes him. Luppi's passivity is reinforced by editing which counterpoints his image sidelined in the frame against those of others who are centred.

Luppi's 'star' entry in A Place in the World is similarly underplayed. Our introduction to his role of father depends on his young son who motivates the actions of the first few scenes. The camera follows the frenetic horse-ride of the young boy until it comes to rest - in the boy's point of view - on a figure, framed from the waist upwards, anonymous because shot from behind. The next cut frames this figure from the front. We have to strain our vision in a muted light to recognize him as Luppi. His stillness is set against the energy of the young boy.

These two Argentine representations of the vulnerable male suggest that Neale's rules concerning the representation of men do only apply to Hollywood films. Aristarain, however, gives Luppi's 'redundant' character narrative agency as well as point-of-view subjectivity. Although in A Place in the World Luppi plays an old vulnerable man in the aftermath of dictatorship and exile, this is a film whose son's search for the father motivates a narrative in which both men still do things, whilst the mother, although a doctor, is usually sitting and talking. Whilst Luppi may be relegated to the background of the frame by his son, he nevertheless moves within it, and many point-of-view shots back to his son are his. Moreover, these point-of-view shots involve us in identification with his quiet suffering at his own sense of distance from his more active son. Whilst such vulnerability is also a feature of his character in Meerapfel's film, our

identification with it is eclipsed by our stronger identification with the women characters in the film - especially with his wife, close ups of whom literally eclipse him. A pertinent question (for further research) of Bemberg's feminist representation of passive men would be whether she does anything different to Meerapfel.

(4,716 words)